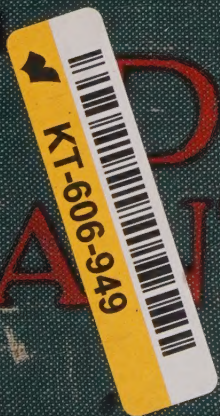




DR.
MANTON

Morice Gerard



FIRST EDITION

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Dr. Manton



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Dr. Manton

By

Morice Gerard

Author of "The Tenant of the Grange," "A Lieutenant of the King"

"The Adventures of an Equerry," "Check to the King"

"The Red Seal," etc. etc.



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PROLOGUE

“CE n'est que le premier pas qui coûte.” The French presentment of a great truth flashed across the mind of Algernon Lysergh—the Hon. Algernon, to give him his full title, the Earl of Caston's second son. It was his first night at Caius College, Cambridge. He had entered the hall for dinner with a certain number of other freshmen. Most of them were public school men, and had several acquaintances, if not friends, at Caius already.

Algernon Lysergh knew no one. His physical organization, unequal shoulders, almost a cripple, had been deemed too delicate for the rough and tumble of school life. He had been educated under a private tutor at home. He possessed already a nervous system of that finest texture which tortures its owner, and in default of the ordinary games and physical exercises suitable to his age, Lysergh had been left to develop abnormally his intellectual powers. His tutor, Marcus Mansfield, was a Caius man ; it was due to his recommendation that Algernon entered his name on the books of that college.

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Mansfield possessed many attractive qualities, and won for himself the cordial approval of Lord and Lady Caston ; yet a worse instructor could, in literal truth, with difficulty have been found for a mind and disposition such as that possessed, to his sorrow, by Algernon Lysergh. Mansfield was a scholar and a gentleman—so far so good ; but he was likewise unfortunately a mystic and a dreamer. While he taught his pupil all that the latter might be expected to acquire in mathematics, classics, general literature, etc., he at the same time imbued him with ideas and predilections for which he was only too well adapted by the accidents of his health and restricted upbringing. Mysticism was sown in a soil more than ready for its propagation. Walking was the only form of exercise Lysergh could indulge in. He and the tutor were fond of wandering off into the woods round Welkin Lodge, Lord Caston's seat in Somerset, of which they had, with the exception of the housekeeper and servants, almost exclusive possession.

At different points the carpenter on the estate had put up rustic seats, generally in very secluded places. Here, amidst the smell of the pines and the bracken, with long vistas stretching before them of solemn aisles of nature's building, Marcus Mansfield and his pupil Algernon Lysergh, only a few years his junior, would read and discuss mysticism and poetry, contributed by all ages, which had preceded and led up to our own.

No wonder that the youth, not yet out of his teens,

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became of a morbid temperament and saw visions, analysed himself with remorseless accuracy and morbid despondency, deprecated the value of life as a gift of God, but rather regarded it as a burden hard to be borne, laid on the shoulders of mankind, which was granted no option in the matter.

Even the very beauty of nature which was lavished on the hills and vales, which were environed by the Quantocks and girt in by the Severn Sea, only deepened the impression; for Algernon and his tutor sought the gloom of the pine woods rather than the sun-kissed uplands.

When Lysergh had entered his twentieth year, the great change in his life came with his removal to Cambridge. Marcus Mansfield had decided to take Orders, a step he had been considering since he left the University. This necessitated some terms of residence at one of the training colleges for the clergy, and consequently separation from his pupil. Lord Caston thought that a year or two at Cambridge, even if his second son did not proceed to a degree, would be of advantage. It had dawned on Lady Caston, and through her permeated to the less observant brain of her husband, that Algernon required a wider horizon, which could only be reached by mixing with men of his own age.

The young man acquiesced, although he shrank from the ordeal. So it came about that early in October he found himself established in comfortable rooms at Caius.

It was a strange sensation to see a number of men

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filing into hall, and to feel that he was to live his life amongst them, yet that they were all total strangers. Algernon's seat was near the door to the left side. His appetite was always of the smallest ; that night he only played with items mechanically selected from the menu. He was engaged in watching the faces and trying to read the characters of the men about him. He wondered whether amongst them all he should find one congenial soul to take the place of Marcus Mansfield, who had hitherto filled an exclusive place in his regard. Lysergh felt that he should like just such a friend again, a little older than himself—a dreamer, a visionary.

He was destined to get something totally different. Perhaps the

“Divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will,”

knew better than Algernon did what was best for him.

The eyes of the new-comer had ranged over the greater part of the fine old hall and its inhabitants, when they came suddenly on a face which made them pause. Instinct drew him ; admiration was compelled. He saw as fine a specimen of buoyant, open, healthy young England as this country can produce. He sought a mystic, a dreamer ; he found an actor in life's drama, an athlete, a born leader of men, stroke of the college boat, the heavy-weight at No. 7 thwart of the Cambridge crew.

Lysergh felt strangely, unaccountably drawn to

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that strong, eager face and athletic form of which only the head and shoulders were visible above the table. Fifty men separated them ; Lysergh could scan the unknown without attracting the latter's attention. They were at different tables.

Each night Lysergh felt his gaze following in the same direction, but his looks and interest were in no way reciprocated. It was not likely, as Algernon reflected to himself bitterly. The object of his admiration was an Apollo, while he himself was a Caliban. In this the young man's warped judgment asserted its full strength. There were few more refined, thoughtful faces in Caius dining-hall than that of the freshman, sitting modestly in the comparatively shadowed corner at the far end, remote from the dons' table.

A month passed, during which the ordinary routine at the opening of October term filled in most of the time.

A sheaf of cards was laid on a small occasional table in Lysergh's sitting-room. He was beginning to have acquaintances, to whom he could nod in the streets of Cambridge, or when passing them in the quad. He no longer sat silent through dinner. His physical disabilities prevented Algernon from rowing, but he was light enough to be a cox ; and it was soon discovered that he had the right sort of nerve and judgment for that onerous position, on which so much depends, especially in racing. It was quite a new experience on the part of Lysergh to take part in any form of athleticism. He was surprised to find

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how much he was interested, how keen, even eager, he became, after the first shyness of going down to the boats, and taking his place had worn off.

One thing Algernon never did—look at himself in the glass when in his flannels. He pictured only too vividly the difference between himself and the oarsmen. He was obsessed with the realization of that misshapen shoulder, and believed other people were as conscious of the deformity as he was. In this he was labouring under a delusion. Men had other things to think about. We are as often as not—especially very shy people—tortured by our own egoism.

One day among several cards he found one inscribed “Alec Manton.” The stroke of the Caius boat, himself in his third year, had broken his usual rule of not calling on freshmen in favour of the rising cox, who had already tried his prentice hand at steering an “eight.”

Manton was his Apollo of the dinner table. Algernon’s face flushed with pleasure when he saw the name of this visitor. Love at first sight is not so uncommon a thing as we sometimes suppose, and it is generally lasting. Lysergh felt the kindred masculine sentiment, whatever it may be styled, from the first moment of his seeing Manton.

The latter, his senior by five years, was studying for a doctor—was, in fact, already qualified with an Edinburgh degree, and wished to add to it a Cambridge distinction. Endowed with large means, he had chosen a profession he loved and in which he was bound to shine.

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The call was returned. Another fortnight passed, without more than a passing nod to indicate that the men had become acquainted.

Algernon's feeling had only deepened. Manton was absorbed in his work, and next to that in the composition of the boat. He had given no thought to Lysergh.

One day, however, Algernon was asked to cox the college eight, which Alec was stroking, and a trial was being given to a couple of new oars. The ordinary cox was in for an examination. Lysergh was in a glow of satisfaction. He meant to acquit himself to the best of his ability, and succeeded even beyond his fondest hopes.

As he was walking back, taking more time than the other men, Manton, who had been giving some instructions to the boatkeeper, came up behind and joined him. His medical eye for the first time noted the hesitating walk, the too rounded right shoulder. Alec had liked Algernon's face in a casual sort of way ; now his professional instinct was roused ; he began to take an interest in him. Instead of passing by with a cheery salutation, as he had intended, and had always done before, Manton stopped by his side. Lysergh gave him a shy glance, and saw that he evidently meant to walk up with him for the remainder of the way to the college. Algernon tried to accommodate his pace to that of his companion, an unnatural rate for him ; in the effort his face flushed, a clear enough indication to the professional eye that he was attempting more than he could do. Dr.

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Manton immediately began to lag behind, as if not caring to hurry. The considerate attitude touched Lysergh in his most sensitive place.

"You did splendidly this afternoon, Lysergh," Manton remarked in cordial tones. "We have never been coxed better. If Hadow goes down at the end of this term, you should certainly step into his shoes."

"Is he likely to do so?"

"Oh, yes, I believe it is settled; if he acquits himself according to the general expectation, in this exam. Hadow is wonderfully clever, and of late he has been working as well, so that I think it is a certainty. You would like to cox the boat, Lysergh, wouldn't you?"

"I don't know that I have ever longed for anything so much," Algernon replied. "Only I am afraid you are putting the case too strongly. It is very kind of you, but there must be other men in the college who could handle the boat better than I can, and of course of longer standing."

"Not a bit of it. Oars are plentiful as blackberries in autumn, but good coxes are rare as white heather, and almost as lucky for the crew that possesses them. You are the right weight, and you have nerve and judgment."

"It is very good of you to say so, but I cannot believe it of myself. I thought I was just a bundle of useless nerves; trying enough to myself in all conscience, and exasperating to those about me."

"I expect you have lived a good deal by yourself

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and got to fancy things, Lysergh," Dr. Manton suggested.

"The first part is true, anyway."

"I think I can answer for the second as well. You see, it is my business as a medical to look beneath the surface of life. Anyway, you have come to the right place to learn your proper value. Most people have to level down at the 'Varsity. If I read you right, Lysergh, you are in the other category; you will have to level up, in your own estimation. I believe that coxing the boat will prove one of the best assistants to that desirable end."

"I expect I shall owe it to you, Manton, if I do succeed to Hadow's place."

"Not at all. We never show any favouritism at Caius as regards the boat. If my own brother rowed behind me and some one else was the better man, he would have to go and the other chap take his place. The boat first, and every other consideration a long way second; that is our watchword. I ask for nothing more myself than the sack, if another and better stroke comes along."

Lysergh glanced sideways at his companion walking by his side, noting for the hundredth time his fine stature and obvious strength.

"There is not much fear of that," Algernon remarked, with a slight laugh, in which was some trace, if not exactly of envy, at any rate of a wish that he himself approached more nearly to Manton's physique.

"I don't know so much about that," the doctor

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replied. "I scale a bit too much for the place ; now, seven in the 'Varsity crew suits me very much better; stroke ought not to be too heavy."

At this point they reached the gate of the college.

"Well, good-bye for the present," Manton remarked, with a nod ; "we shall meet again in hall before long, or, at any rate, see each other in the distance."

Lysergh turned and spoke, almost by force of impulse, without any consideration. Had he given himself time the words would never have come.

"I have enjoyed my walk," he exclaimed. "I should like to know you. I feel it would do me good," his lip quivered.

Manton stretched out his hand. "It's a bargain," he replied. "I like you."

From that time forwards the two men met frequently, not as casual acquaintances, but as those do who are forming a closer bond, an ever ripening friendship. They had a common plane of intellectuality, for Alec Manton was not merely a man of the open air, an athlete and nothing else ; he had another side quite as pronounced and strongly developed—he was a student of life as well as medicine. His studies had convinced him of the intimate alliance and sympathy between mind and matter, soul and body. His cheery optimism of outlook and robust common sense were the best possible antidotes to his new friend's morbid mysticism ; but Manton's mental equipment was too varied for him

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not to be able to see and appreciate, and consequently allow for Algernon's standpoint. Nothing jars friendship like mutual misunderstanding, while nothing cements it like mutual appreciation. There must always be a point of contact, especially where there is otherwise marked dissimilarity.

Frequently Lysergh and Manton would avoid hall, as the term went on, and dine instead in each other's room, and over an after-dinner pipe discuss the problems of life which interested both alike. It was good for Lysergh to mix with his fellows, so that Manton restricted this friendly interchange to once a week. Lysergh would have preferred that it should have been almost a nightly fixture. The time after dinner was the only one, throughout the day, which the doctor could give up to leisure and unrestricted companionship. At nine p.m. he was always back in his rooms, ready to work until midnight, and sometimes into the small hours of the morning.

"You are a confirmed pessimist, Lysergh," Manton remarked one evening after Algernon had been expressing himself in his usual deprecatory way, regarding life as a burden to be borne, steps to be wearily traced from inception to completion.

"I wish you would call me Algy," the younger man interjected. There was a sensitive flush on the delicate face. He had wished to say it many times, but had hitherto lacked courage. He always felt that Manton was so much his superior in every way that he conferred a favour by his friendship.

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“ Very well, Algy it shall be ; only in that case I must, of course, be Alec to you. It seems funny that I have not been called by my Christian name since I was a kid. You see, I have no near relations, and I have never made any intimate friendship up to the present.”

“ That is one of the things I like about you best,” Lysergh put in quickly.

Manton laughed. “ What a rum beggar you are. Why do you like it better that I should not have made any intimate friendships ? Don’t you think it argues something lacking in my equipment ? ”

“ Oh, no ; just the other way. You were kept for me. If you had had shoals of friends, as you could easily, I should never have got near you. As it is, you are just everything to me, and my ambition is—I know I shall never attain it—to be the same to you.”

There was silence for two or three minutes while they both smoked, quietly looking into the fire which burned before them. Then Manton laughed. “ I believe you would be as jealous as any woman, Algy, on the slightest provocation.” He was speaking half seriously, half in jest.

“ Yes, it is true. I should hate any one coming in between me and my friend.”

The response, at any rate, was serious enough.

Manton took his pipe out of his mouth, and looked at Lysergh’s fine eyes, dilated in accordance with the strenuous feeling at the back of them.

“ You are an interesting study, Algy ; but I should

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like to see you shake off some of these feelings. They are excrescences, and should be removed from a healthy tissue."

"Only the knife would do it," Lysergh answered. "Yes, you are right, Alec, I am a pessimist ; I have always been a pessimist as long as I can remember. Who would not be a pessimist"—he gave an expressive shrug to his shoulders—"who was what I am ?" At the end of the sentence he dropped his voice ; the last words were said with infinite pathos. He cracked the stem of his pipe between his fingers in the stress of his feeling ; then he got up, and taking another briar from a rack above the mantelpiece slowly filled it, his back turned towards his friend. Manton watched him with quick sympathy.

"You exaggerate, Algy," the doctor said after a pause, during which he had pondered how he should phrase his remark, "I will not say your defects, for they do not amount to that, but your disabilities ; at the same time, co-ordinately you underrate your qualities."

"Qualities!" Lysergh exclaimed ironically, yet he watched the doctor with intense expectancy for what was to come next. It was new to him to be appreciated.

"Do you suppose," Manton asked, "that it is not due to what I see in you, that I have opened my heart and my inmost thoughts for your inspection, and for no one else's. Remember, I am at least six years older than you are ; my time at Cambridge is nearly over, while yours is only beginning. I have

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probably as many, or more, acquaintances than any other man in the 'Varsity ; yet here I am in a shell of reserve until you crossed my horizon, and dragged me forth into the light of day. Why have I yielded ? Because you have in your possession the very qualities of which I have spoken. No man can expect to receive unless he is prepared to give ; I like to receive your confidences, the intimate concerns of your mind, and so I give mine. It is a kind of barter, the exchange of goods for value received."

There was an intense pause after Manton had said these words, with that fine energy of diction which characterized him, and which could not help carrying conviction. After a while Lysergh got up and paced the room. His back was towards Manton, but the latter could see his shoulders working, an indication he always gave when he was deeply moved. At length he broke the silence.

"Did you ever see a black cloud shadowing the whole sky, until all the face of nature was shrouded in gloom ? The very trees hung their branches and the leaves shook and rustled in sympathy ; then the sun forced itself through the opaque darkness, elbowing aside the serried masses of cloud. The light fought with and overcame its enemy. The giant sun stretched out its strong arm in all directions. The trees lifted up their heads. The mountains and hills, which had been shadowed in gloom, laughed and sang. Life had won. The sun had conquered. That is what has happened to me. You are my sun. All my life has been steeped in gloom and darkness.

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I have groped after ideals which have evaded my grasp. I have felt myself shut in by a wall higher than myself and with no helps to scale it ; my very existence had become a burden. Now you have stretched out your strong hand and lifted me up. I am yours body and soul, Alec, from this time forward."

When Manton left Lysergh's room, and returned to his own, he found work impossible. He needed air, and presently, taking his hat, went out and paced the quadrangle. The vision of his friend obtruded itself upon him in such a way as to drive out all other thoughts.

The problem of life, how multiple it is, how insoluble.

"Where are you going to spend the Christmas vac ? " Lysergh asked his friend one evening, about ten days from the October term. They were sitting, as usual, in the former's rooms after dinner.

"I have arranged to go to my old quarters in the 'Albany.' I shall retire there with my books, and expect to do no end of work while the rest of the world is junketing as usual," Alec answered.

"Why not come down to me at Welkin Lodge ? " Lysergh suggested. "My people are all at Pau. They want me to join them there, but I do not care about it. I hate a place I have never been to. I feel that every one stares at me. Give me either the depths of the country, where there is no one to look, or London, where nobody cares. I never feel that

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way in town. They are used to all kinds of freaks, some of them indigenous, and the rest imported from every country under the sun."

Lysergh spoke with even unwonted bitterness; one of his dark moods was upon him, which he no longer attempted to dissemble before Manton; that is at once the proof and penalty of friendship—namely, that you can afford to be natural.

"One day I hope, Algy, you will learn to throw all that off like a hideous nightmare which wakefulness dispels. People certainly do not notice you in the way you imagine. They are far more likely to note the intelligence and high-bred feeling expressed in your face than any other things you imagine to be prominent. Now, about your kind offer. I should enjoy very much spending a few weeks with you, provided that I have my uninterrupted hours for study, which must not be invaded."

"You shall come on your own conditions," Lysergh responded eagerly. He had made his proposal with some diffidence, and had by no means expected such an easy acquiescence.

Manton was curious to see Welkin Lodge. He knew that it lay in a very beautiful part of the country with which, however, he was quite unfamiliar. Then, again, his friend had described the place with not a little successful word-painting. He understood how nearly Lysergh's attitude of mind corresponded with the environment, in which he had spent the most plastic part of his life.

Welkin Lodge, in one sense, did not disappoint the

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young doctor ; in another he felt that it was the worst possible habitation for a man of Algernon's temperament. Of course, the time of the year lent itself to deepen the impression of gloom and solitude. The trees, except the evergreens and firs, were bare of leaves, gaunt, almost forbidding. The hills stood out bleak and cold. The valleys were swampy and reeking with moisture. Manton himself enjoyed a tramp with his gun, or a ride with a pack of foxhounds or harriers, at certain intervals, when he permitted himself an indulgence, but Lysergh had none of these distractions. Riding in his case was out of the question, and shooting almost equally so ; his physique was not equal to the strain of either exercise. Manton felt that the solitude, gloom, and damp of the winter landscape around Welkin Lodge affected Lysergh's whole nature and impregnated his spirit. Alec abandoned some part of his intention, with reference to the work he had planned, to afford companionship to his host. He knew that when alone the latter brooded and moped. The doctor made up his mind that never again, if he could prevent it, should Lysergh spend any length of time—at any rate, in the winter—at this secluded seat of the Earl of Caston.

An incident which happened one night during his stay confirmed Manton's determination, and enabled him to extract a promise to that effect from his friend.

Alec had given up the afternoon to shooting. It was New Year's Eve. Lord Caston was in the habit

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of sending out presents of game, at the beginning of the year, to various professional people resident in the neighbouring districts. The keepers had orders to shoot a certain number of head, and Manton had been requisitioned to give his assistance ; he was a splendid shot. At ten p.m. he said good night to Lysergh and retired to the sitting-room, which had been appropriated by the housekeeper for his use from the time of his arrival. A teapot had been placed ready to enable him to keep a clear brain ; a kettle stood on the hob.

Two hours passed, during which time Alec had managed to give a certain amount of attention to what he was doing. Then his head drooped over the table ; he went to sleep, for how long he was unable to decide. He awoke cramped and with a sense that something was happening ; something was astir in the house.

He rose up and, after stretching himself, walked to the door and opened it. Hardly had he done so than he noticed something white passing across the darkness of the hall, upon which his door opened, at the further end from the main entrance.

Manton was not given to nerves, and was certainly not the least superstitious, but even he felt a curious sensation down his spine, when the gliding vision first presented itself. The great lonely house, the midnight hour, and the intense quiet made a combination effective enough to influence the strongest and most common-senseful of personalities. He heard a bolt shot back and then another ; a key

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turned in a lock. Manton was himself again in a minute. Bolts and locks are too ordinary and commonplace to lend themselves to anything supernatural.

The great hall door opened ; a gust of air, cold and penetrating, swept through the ground-floor of the house. It struck Manton with an icy chill. Instantly he stepped forward, and, with footfalls light as he could make them, hurried to the door. Outside it was lighter than it was within. A moon was shining, not far off the full, but with a crescent cloud half shrouding it. Some half a dozen steps led down from the hall door to the drive. On the last of them stood a figure Manton could not mistake. It was his friend in night attire. His arms were stretched out before him as if he were groping in the dark. Alec understood by the gesture that Algy was walking in his sleep. The situation was a difficult one, to decide what to do. If he awoke his friend the shock to his nervous system might be of grave detriment as regards his health. On the other hand, if left alone he was in great danger of getting a chill, which might be equally disastrous to his feeble physique.

While the doctor paused, uncertain which course to pursue, Lysergh stepped down, turned to the right, and began rapidly to walk with bare feet along the gravel of the drive. Manton followed him at the same pace. About ten yards from the house was a small gate, which opened on a footpath, leading past a small piece of ornamental water frequented by wild fowl of all descriptions. Lysergh made straight for this pond

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and stood on the brink ; the water was deep at this end. Manton was horrified to see that he was about to fling himself in. His indecision vanished. He ran up to his friend, and seized his wrist just as his body was poised over the water.

Algy turned, and with a great cry awoke. He recognized where he was, and by whose instrumentality the plunge he had been about to make was frustrated. Then he flung his arms round Manton's neck, and sobbed on his shoulders like a child. The young doctor took up the feeble form in his arms, carried him straight up to his room and put him to bed.

Algy seemed half dazed. He had uttered no articulate words since he had been roused from his sleep. Manton went downstairs. Fortunately the fire was still burning ; he boiled up the water in the kettle, and soon prepared a stiff glass of grog. He took it up, and supporting Algy induced him, half by persuasion, half by force, to drink it. Throughout the rest of the night Manton lay in a corner of the room enveloped in blankets and rugs.

All the next day Lysergh remained in bed. Manton acted both as doctor and nurse. He administered a sedative at stated hours. Lysergh slept but little ; he seemed in a comatose state, hardly conscious of the passing hours or of any one entering or leaving his apartment.

A week passed, before his patient was strong enough to come downstairs. Mentally and physically he was in a state of collapse, suffering from

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shock. At the end of that time Manton removed his friend up to London. He took him to an hotel in the West End, with rooms looking out on the park, and at the same time sufficiently near to be in touch with the life and movement of the city. Not a word had passed between them of the experiences of New Year's Eve.

On the day before they were due to return to Cambridge, Lysergh referred to the incident for the first time. They had been talking about the boat. Hadow had passed his examination, and had gone down from Cambridge at the end of the preceding term. Lysergh's position would be assured directly the committee of the boat club met. The prospect had given new life and courage to the invalid.

"There is something I want to say to you, Alec, and I must say it to-night."

The transition of tone was abrupt from the light conversation which had gone before.

"Out with it, old man."

"I want to tell you—I could not before, I don't know why—that I shall never forget that you saved my life. I am afraid I have never valued it over much, but I do now, and shall always, because you have given it back to me, Alec."

"Stuff and nonsense! I did the most ordinary thing in the world."

Lysergh turned, and looked the doctor straight in the eyes.

"But for you," he said, "I should have died that night in that awful pond." Lysergh had turned

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white to the lips. "I can never forget it ; the white moonlight shining on the black water when I awoke, and feeling the grip of your hand upon my wrist."

"There ! don't talk about it any more ; but I want you to promise me one thing."

"What is that ?"

"That you will never stay at Welkin Lodge again."

Lysergh laughed, but it had a grim cadence ; it was a hollow mockery of a laugh.

"I can promise that easily enough, for nothing in the world would induce me to set foot in the place again."

On the following day the two friends returned to Caius. It was Manton's last term.

A SCEPTIC

A SWELTERING day early in the middle of the month of August was drawing towards its close. Dr. Alec Manton's partner, Maurice Farner, was on his holiday in Scotland. He had had an invitation from a very old friend to shoot over his Scotch moor at Glendoyle, in Inverness-shire, and see the commencement of what the keepers had predicted would prove to be one of the best seasons for grouse on record. Dr. Manton had consequently for the last few days been doing double tides—his partner's round of visits as well as his own. As he sped along in his shapely little motor-victoria his thoughts had strayed from the case he had just left, or the one he was just about to attend, to his partner's much more enviable lot among the Scotch moors. He pictured him having a good time, enjoying the sport, drinking in the invigorating air, and admiring some of the most picturesque views in the British Isles. Both the partners in the firm were men of athletic tastes, and could consequently sympathize with one another. Farner, although the junior partner, was the older man by several years.

Dr. Manton did not grudge Maurice Farner his more enviable lot ; he was far too good a fellow for

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anything of that sort, only he would have liked to be there or thereabouts, too. August in suburban London is by no means attractive.

Ten years had passed since Alec Manton had left Cambridge, after taking all the honours that famous medical school could award. Now nearly five-and-thirty, Manton was in the very prime of his life and powers. His partner was a widower with two or three children, but Manton remained a bachelor, with seemingly no intention of changing his condition. Not a few appreciative glances had been cast in his direction by those of the opposite sex, who would have been only too glad to meet the young medical man more than half-way, but they failed to hit the target. Dr. Manton had a great respect for the sex not his own, and treated its representatives of all classes, whether patients or social acquaintances, with a delicate chivalry not a few of them would have preferred to interpret into a deeper and more personal feeling. But towards the love of women Alec had felt as yet not the very faintest inclination. He was set down in the neighbourhood as a confirmed bachelor. He was not only heart whole, but even imagination whole ; that is to say, he had never even pictured for himself the sort of woman he would choose, if he ever did choose one, to share his life. Perhaps some of the reserve which had marked his career earlier in life and caused him to have many acquaintances, and yet only one familiar friend, had something to do with his disinclination to form a different kind of attachment.

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It was close upon 7.30 p.m. on this particular evening that Dr. Manton drove up to his own door, 24 Alvers Street, S.W. He had managed to complete his rounds in time to arrive punctually. He was expecting Algernon Lysergh, the inseparable friend now of ten years, to dine with him. Lysergh had qualified for a barrister after leaving Cambridge, where he did not proceed to a degree. He resided now altogether in London, having a suite of rooms in his father's, Lord Caston's, town house, in Hyde Park Gardens, entirely at his disposal. The rooms were provided with a private entrance, so that in his goings and comings Algernon was independent of the rest of the family.

"Has Mr. Lysergh arrived?" Manton asked of the servant who opened the door.

"Yes, sir. He came a few minutes ago, and is in the library."

Manton gave his instructions to his chauffeur, and then went to the room indicated. The barrister was curled up in an attitude peculiarly his own, with his legs crossed, in a huge arm-chair under the window.

"Pheugh! hot is no word for it," Alec cried as he strode across the room and grasped his friend's thin, long hand, the latter half rising as he did so. "You look enviably cool, Algy, as you always do. I wish you would tell me the secret how you manage it, that I, too, may temper August with December."

A slight contraction of annoyance, almost of pain, came to Lysergh's forehead, and spoke from his eyes, for a moment, as he replied—

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"There is nothing of me to be hot. You cannot picture a skeleton complaining of a torrid temperature. Men of muscle, like you, Alec, or of fat, like my brother Bateman, suffer from the heat; it passes me by. I have no difficulty in being cool, even in the dog-days; I only wish I had."

Manton saw that his friend was in one of his dark moods, and realized that he had made a mistake in the casual remark which had dropped from him without thought. He did not pursue the conversation.

"I will run away and wash my hands; then I shall be glad to have dinner. I am fairly hungry, and, above all, I long for an iced drink of fair proportions."

Before Manton returned to the library the dinner gong sounded. The doctor came back immediately for his friend, and they crossed the hall together, arm in arm. Very little was said during the meal. Lysergh was never loquacious; that night he was even abnormally silent and preoccupied. Manton had a good deal to think about, and finding conversation difficult, also relapsed into silence. Beyond the ordinary amenities of the table nothing passed between the friends towards the close of dinner.

After the meal was over the doctor went to his surgery, where he always gave up an hour at this time to patients, who came to consult him at his own residence. Lysergh had gone back to the chair he had occupied previously, armed with a pipe

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and an evening paper, the latter, however, hardly engrossing any of his attention.

Shortly after nine o'clock the doctor returned to the snugger, which was dignified in the household with the name of the library, and rejoined his chum with a sigh of relief. He was specially glad that night to have seen the back of his last patient. He now took down a big briar from the mantelpiece and proceeded to fill it from a tobacco jar of mammoth dimensions, which occupied a place of honour in the centre of a smoking-cabinet Manton had designed and had had made for himself. While he was doing this Lysergh looked up at the big, strong man with eyes full of affection, curiously reminiscent of a faithful dog. The strong bond between these two seemed to be forged out of their very contrast, both physical and mental. It has been said that in all relationships based on the affections "one loves, and the other is loved," the truth being, of course, that both in depth of capacity for affection and the power of demonstrating it outwardly there must always be wide diversions. No two persons are organized exactly alike, or show what they feel in the same way.

Algernon Lysergh loved Alec Manton with all the intensity of his affectionate nature. He may be said, with truth, to have worshipped the very ground the latter trod upon. On the other hand, Alec Manton was much less demonstrative. For one thing his nature was widely different ; for another his life was too full, too many-sided in its activities, too much

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occupied with the perpetual claims upon it, to be able to centre itself in his friend in a reciprocal degree.

"You know, Alec, what a beastly sensitive, supernatural sort of superstitious chap I am," Lysergh remarked by way of apology for what he was about to say. He had curled himself up even more closely than before into his chair.

Dr. Manton nodded, hardly bestowing a glance on his chum, being engaged in filling his pipe to his satisfaction.

"I don't know how it is," Lysergh went on, "I have been thinking and worrying about you all day, Alec. I think the fact is, the dream I had about you last night has been more vivid by day even than it was when it came to me by night."

Manton turned round and looked at him, his pipe in one hand and the match-box in the other. "What a fellow you are, Algy," he said. "Always starting some new quarry and hunting it for all you are worth. What did you have for dinner last night? Come, own up. Dreams are only indigestion in one syllable. The poet was not far wrong when he wrote that nonsense about—Shakespeare, wasn't it?—'We are such stuff as dreams are made of.' Well, dreams are made of indigestion; and if there is one malady that all flesh is heir to in the twentieth century, it is indigestion."

"Don't be so dreadfully prosaic, Alec; it jars. I hate you when you are in one of your cynical, scoffing moods."

Dr. Manton had by this time succeeded in

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lighting his pipe and making it draw properly. He now threw up his arms with a gesture of resignation, and then dropped into a comfortable easy chair on the opposite side of the window, similar to the one his friend occupied. He had dined to his satisfaction, had finished, as he thought, his work for the day, and was at peace with all men.

"I apologize," he said. "I retract my disrespectful remarks with reference to visions of the night. Now, my friend, tell me your dream, and in all seriousness I will expound the interpretation thereof, like a second Daniel."

"I hope there is no interpretation," Lysergh replied, "and I should not trust yours in any case, you are such an unbeliever. To interpret mysteries is only given to the select few, who must have the faith equipment."

"Come now, don't be cross ; I really am all attention and receptivity." Dr. Manton sent up a cloud of smoke into the air which floated out through the window ; he followed it with his eyes. If his thoughts had been expressed aloud, which for obvious reasons they were not, he would have pronounced his opinion that dreams and clouds of tobacco smoke were alike empty nothings dissipating into thin air.

Lysergh took up his parable. "Well, I dreamt that you and I were out for a walk in a most beautiful country. It was the height of summer, as it is now, only everything seemed beautifully fresh and green, not like these dusty trees in London. We

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were talking about all sorts of things, as we used to do in the old days at Welkin Lodge. I was thoroughly enjoying myself ; suddenly I felt conscious we were not alone. At the same moment you turned round. I was looking straight at you, and I saw something in your eyes I had never seen before."

"Green !" interjected Manton. "A deep sea-green !"

Lysergh did not take the slightest notice of the interruption. He did not hear it with his mind even if it reached his ears. He was too absorbed in the vivid recollection of the scene he was recalling. He went on ; "I was jealous of that look. I felt it pain me to see the expression in your eyes. I believe I struggled to rouse myself from sleep, and by waking escape from it, without avail. At this point I was impelled to transfer my gaze from your face and to look behind us. I saw a woman approaching—a girl, in fact, young and very beautiful. I should know her again. She was dressed—at any rate, as regards the upper part of her body—in some clinging white material, which fitted her as if it had grown upon her."

"Wings, dear friend, wings," Manton murmured softly, without taking the pipe from his teeth.

Lysergh heard the interjected remark this time.

"No, it was not an angel, Alec. It was a woman, a woman of flesh and blood."

"Is not that the same thing ?" Manton suggested. "Are not all angels women ? I cannot picture a man-angel, although I suppose that Michael must

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have been one. And are not all good women angels ? ”

Lysergh went on, disregarding general principles ; “ She came close to you, but did not quite touch you, although you held out your arms to her.”

“ That would be a new experience,” Manton laughed to himself. “ It is more than I have ever done to any real woman. I can tell you the interpretation of your dream already. It shows conclusively that nothing but an angel will satisfy me.” Alec Manton laughed more loudly after he had finished the last sentence—a hearty, gurgling, bass laugh. He was so perfectly and absolutely satisfied of his own invulnerability as far as the other sex was concerned.

“ Alec,” Lysergh went on, “ don’t laugh ; you have no idea how it hurts me. To think that, first of all, you should stretch out your arms to any woman, that you should look at her like that, and then to think that she should not come to you when you wanted her. I should hate you to love any one but me, but I should hate much more still that any one should think of spurning your love, should turn away from you. You ! you ! why no one could be good enough for you in my eyes.”

“ Come now, don’t pile it on, old friend ; you make me positively blush, and this incandescent light shows it all up most uncomfortably.”

Algvy waved his right arm with his pipe in his hand, indicating silence. “ Don’t interrupt,” he said. “ Let me tell you the rest.”

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"Go on," Manton answered, "I am all attention."

"At this point in my dream, while you were still holding out your arms, the girl turned abruptly away. She walked off very rapidly, and you followed, but you did not succeed in overtaking her. She seemed to disappear as suddenly as she had originally come into view. For a few moments I could not see you either. I stood quite still, and waited for what seemed a long time. Presently you came back, but your face was, oh! so changed, so drawn and white, as if you were in great pain, mental or physical."

"You see, the indigestion had transferred itself evidently from you to me; what we call sympathetic transference. It is much commoner than you laymen imagine."

"Alec," his friend implored, "I wish you would be serious for a moment. I have been waiting to tell you this all day, for it has covered me like a pall. Now, when I have the opportunity and have you to myself, you do nothing but make fun of it. It hurts me, for *I know there is something in it*. I know it, I know it; I feel it here." Lysergh struck his narrow chest with his open hand.

"It's that confounded cucumber
I've eat and can't digest,"

Manton quoted, but this time *sotto voce*, for he saw his chum was in deadly earnest.

Lysergh went on after a pause, during which he was obviously living again the feeling he had experi-

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enced in his dream. "When I saw you come back to me looking like that, so sorrowful and hopeless, I tried to say something to you, something not quite formed or shaped into words—I suppose with the intention of comforting you, but I felt that my lips would not move. I was brain and tongue-tied. Just then a cold wind seemed to sweep over the landscape and to pierce me through. It had been almost oppressively hot when we commenced this walk. I felt compelled to look round. The smiling landscape had gone, and in its place had come, not winter exactly, but a cold barrenness, such as we get sometimes at the end of March, as if a bitter east wind and biting frost had touched all the flowers and shrivelled up the leaves. I could see in your face that you felt it, too. The beauty and the glory of the earth had departed. I shivered two or three times, and then I found myself sitting up in bed, wide awake. I cannot tell you what a terrible experience it all was, so real and abiding. I have lived it all over again continually throughout the day."

Dr. Manton got up from his lounge chair, walked across the room, and taking his friend's wrist held his pulse while he checked it off with his watch.

"Strange!" he exclaimed. "I expected to find your pulse quite feverish, but, on the contrary, it is quite as normal as yours ever is. That mention of shivering put me on the wrong scent; it sounded so like the beginning of influenza, or a fever of some kind."

"Alec," Lysergh protested, "will you never be-

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lieve that there is anything beyond and above, outside what is explicable by your science ? ”

“ Oh, yes,” Manton replied, “ I do not dispute that for a moment. I quite agree that there are many things—countless things, perhaps—of which we cannot find a rational solution at present. We are learning something fresh about these matters, I am thankful to say, every day. That there is anything which science, if it ever succeeds in becoming a complete study, cannot account for and solve, there I do take issue. If there is a mystery, it is not because it is insoluble, but because we have not yet found the right key, the true solution ; that we shall find it ultimately I, for one, do not hesitate to believe and declare.”

“ Then you do not allow, Alec, that there are forces in life which are not subject to, or capable of, scientific analysis—phenomena, outside law, and not to be confined within its limits ? ”

“ No, I don’t,” replied Manton, sturdily placing his back against the empty fireplace, his right shoulder resting on the mantelshelf. “ I believe, nay, I am almost sure, that law is universal in nature and in human life.”

“ There you and I differ,” Lysergh exclaimed. “ I hold to the supernatural, a world untrammelled by rules and regulations, according to man’s limited understanding.”

“ Mind you, Algy,” Manton replied in a deeper tone than he had used hitherto during that conversation, “ I believe in a first cause just as much as

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you do. All I maintain is that that first cause acts according to ordered methods, fixed principles ; that life, in fact, is neither confusion or chaos, but just as symmetrical as that wonderful and beautiful organism, the human body."

In one corner of the snugger in which the friends were holding their conversation a telephone was fitted up. It communicated with Manton's partner's house, a couple of miles away, and was also, of course, in connection with the General Telephone Exchange. Just as the doctor had uttered the last words he was rung up on the instrument. Manton laid down his pipe on the mantelpiece by his side, and walked across the room in response to the call. The incident was as common as anything else in the daily routine of his life—such, for instance, as breakfast or dinner. The only annoying part about it was, that the summons would probably mean the doctor's having to go out again, that was all. It was part of his professional life, and too frequent an occurrence for Manton to allow it to disturb him in the slightest degree. Why should it ?

As Alec passed his friend's chair to go to the telephone he noticed that he had turned even paler than usual.

"What is the matter, Algy ?" he asked. "Are you feeling any chill from that window ? You are such a cold subject." The doctor stretched out his hand immediately to shut down the casement.

"Please don't do that, I much prefer it open ; I need the air," Lysergh protested.

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Manton saw that his friend's feeling was mental rather than physical owing to the stress of his excitement.

"How you do work yourself up. It is all that stupid conversation we have been indulging in."

"I hate that beastly telephone," Lysergh declared vehemently. "I know the call which has just sounded has something to do with the horrible woman in my dream."

"Is that all? Well, never mind; it is a great advantage to be forewarned. Thanks to you, I shall be on the look out for her wiles, and so able to checkmate them if she comes my way."

Manton laid his hand on Lysergh's shoulder, and looked into his eyes with an affectionate glance almost, if not quite, as warm as that of his chum towards himself.

"Don't let dreams disturb you," he said; "there is plenty of real sorrow and trouble in life, as my professional duties tell me every day, without weaving more unnecessarily out of such unsubstantial and uncomfortable things."

II

A CUL-DE-SAC

ALEC MANTON laughed. "You see, after all, it's a man, Lysergh. So much for your dreams."

The doctor had been rung up from the public telephone call office in Bennester Street, a new neighbourhood of small houses at the extreme end of his district. Within the range of the partners' operations there was a large fashionable neighbourhood, occupied by rich, or, at any rate, well-to-do, people, and, on the outskirts of these streets of large houses with good gardens, there was a rapidly extending area which had recently become the prey of the speculative builder. This gentleman had overreached himself, having provided more accommodation than was at present, at any rate, required. Consequently many houses were unoccupied, and some were even left unfinished, until fresh demand should stimulate further supply.

It was to a house in one of these melancholy streets, No. 17 Cursitor Avenue—an "avenue" by ironical reference, it is to be presumed, to the fact that a number of fine trees had been cut down to make way for it. The summons came from Nurse Walters, who had frequently served Dr. Manton's patients and was specially skilled in mental cases. Through the telephone the nurse had rapidly

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sketched the nature of the case. The man was a dipsomaniac who had chosen to live in a street which had an outlet only at one end, and in which only the house he occupied was as yet let. Mr. Conybeare, the patient in question, had a manservant to wait upon him who was, unfortunately, a kindred spirit, perhaps chosen for that reason, and a housekeeper-cook who was nearly stone deaf. When Conybeare had reached a stage which amounted to positive illness Walters had been called in, and as the sick man required a strong soporific she had taken the responsibility upon herself of summoning the doctor.

Briefly and laconically all this had been conveyed over the telephone to Manton. The latter now touched the electric bell. When the parlour-maid appeared he said—

“Tell Giles I shall want the motor round directly. I shall not take him out again, but will drive myself.”

Manton very frequently, even when the chauffeur was present, preferred to drive. He was fond of anything mechanical, and if he had not elected to be a doctor would certainly have preferred to be an engineer.

“You had better stay here until I return, Algy. I can get along with my motor pretty fast at this time of night, when the streets are comparatively empty of vehicles, and the case ought not to take up very much time.”

“Very well, I will wait, or, better still, why should I not come with you? You will want some one to

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'hold the horse' while you are looking after the human element."

"There is no fear of his running away," Manton laughed.

"No ; but some one might take a fancy to running away with him. Such things have been heard of."

"Well, I have stood the chance a good many times and should not be afraid of risking it once more ; but, anyway, I shall be awfully glad of your company if you do not mind the waiting, old chap."

"I should like to see you through, I must say," Lysergh said seriously.

Manton, who was engaged in putting certain things he thought he might require into a small leather bag, glanced across at his friend, inquiry in his eyes. "Still harping on that dream ?" he inquired.

"Am I not a man who when once he gets an idea sticks to it, perhaps because of its rarity ? Yes, I am still harping on my dream, if you must know. I go with you as your guardian angel."

"Thanks."

Manton was evidently a little nettled at this persistence on the part of Lysergh. The feeling passed in a minute, however. He knew what a rare friendship it was which his chum had bestowed upon him in full measure, and could appreciate its nature even when it annoyed him a little.

"Now I am ready," Manton said.

The two men went to the hall door together. Outside were the gleaming eyes of the motor, like those of some wild beast in a tropical forest. It was

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throbbing, too, like some sentient animal. All this passed through Lysergh's brain, which was strung up to concert pitch by his own imaginative gifts. Dr. Manton saw only a rapid and comfortable means of transit to the place at which he wished to arrive.

"You can go to bed," was the final direction to the chauffeur, "if I am later than ten o'clock; I will put away the victoria."

"Thank you, sir."

Then they sped off, first through more busy and crowded thoroughfares, then into the comparative loneliness and silence of the new neighbourhood, where shops were few and far between, and the master of even the smallest of these was engaged in putting up the shutters for the night.

It was a fine night, not exactly dark, sufficiently light, in fact, to excuse the authorities from having the lamps lighted. The air was very pleasant and refreshing after the sultry day. The two friends got the full benefit of it as the motor sped along. Lysergh felt his anxious and desponding mood being dispelled under the influence of the exhilarating motion. Manton had his attention occupied by driving, and looking out for the necessary turns and twists, as they traversed various streets on the road. He knew his way quite well as far as Bennester Street, a long, high road which formed the main artery of traffic for a long distance. But Cursitor Avenue was quite unknown to him, as it was to most people living much closer to it.

Opposite the "Hen and Chickens," in Bennester

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Street, Dr. Manton pulled up, and asked his way from a policeman.

"Turn down the first street on the right, sir—it is called Fallern Road; then Cursitor Avenue is the second on the left. It's rather rough and unsafe, sir. I doubt if you can turn your carriage in it. There are not more than two houses occupied, if that, and the stuff for making the road and some of the building materials are lying about in heaps. The County Council has not taken over Fallern Road as yet, much less Cursitor Avenue."

"Thanks for the caution, officer. I will leave my motor in Fallern Road. I suppose I can go down that with safety?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"You see, it is a good thing I did come," Lysergh suggested. "You would not have cared to leave the victoria so far away."

"No; I should have had to ask a policeman to give a look to it, and beyond our friend in the high road I don't see any one about."

They drove up Fallern Road, in which nearly every other house had a board up with "To let" upon it. Not even an inn broke with its lights the long row of dull, dark ugliness. A clock had struck ten as they pulled up opposite the "Hen and Chickens" and inquired the way from the policeman.

"They seem to go to bed early in these parts," Manton remarked, as he kept an eye on the look out for the turning into the avenue.

"I suppose there is nothing else to do," Lysergh

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answered in an absent-minded fashion. As the motor slowed down his exhilaration had gone, and his apprehensions of something impending had returned.

Manton noted his change of tone and guessed its cause. "Not much like the scenery of your dream," he suggested, with a nod towards the street of stucco and shabby gentility. "No suggestion of waving trees and lovely flowers about this district I should say—only the name 'avenue' to give point to the irony of it!"

"That was an allegory of what our life has been together, Alec—all the first part of what I saw. You do not know; you can never realize, for you do not need it as I do, what our friendship has been to me."

"It has been an immense lot to me also," Manton replied rather testily. "But why speak of it in that melancholy way, as if it were all a thing of the past? I hope it's a case of 'as it was, is now, and ever shall be.'"

Lysergh did not answer. Something told him that they were on the threshold of a great change, and that it would mean an immense deal to him; but it was too intangible—although none the less real—to put it into words.

Manton got out and took the leathern bag from the box specially prepared for it under the driver's seat.

"Shall I lock the wheel, or leave it as it is?"

"Not worth while taking the trouble." Lysergh

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settled himself to wait, while Manton strode off on his errand.

Cursitor Avenue was, as has been said, a veritable cul-de-sac. It had about two dozen houses on each side. At the end was a high dead wall with broken glass at the top, the boundary of some extensive brickfields, from which the building stacks of the neighbourhood were recruited. As far as the doctor could see not a house was occupied, and the greater part were left with only the skeleton framework complete. No wonder. Who would choose to live in such a narrow, melancholy street, when there were plenty of other places to be got close to? The very air of heaven seemed to be dealt out in grudging measure. Between these walls the closeness of the day still lingered. What had brought this man Conybeare to settle in Cursitor Avenue? Probably the very thing which kept others away—its isolation and loneliness. He could stagger home of a night with his man-servant, who was addicted to the drink habit too, without attracting the comments of his neighbours, for of neighbours there were none.

No. 17 was, with one exception—No. 24, higher up, of which more anon—the only house without a board in the road. Manton had found it now, in fact, he had been guided to it for some distance by gleams which shot from the sides of the blinds into the air outside. There were lights upstairs, but not on the ground-floor.

The doctor, not sorry to have reached his destination, knocked loudly at the door. In a minute or

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two it was opened, and Nurse Walters appeared on the threshold.

"I thought it was you, doctor, although I did not hear your carriage."

"The policeman in Bennester Street advised me to leave it at the end of the road. I am glad I did so, as the chances of an upset are pretty even at night in a place like this."

"It is good of you to come so promptly, Doctor Manton," Walters said as she led the way upstairs. "The pay is such that I could not refuse the case, but I doubt if it is worth it. I am practically alone with a madman. The housekeeper dare not go near Mr. Conybeare, and is in bed when his worst times are on him. They always come on about this hour. His man Myers is nearly always drunk. Fortunately I have no nerves to speak of, and am physically strong, or I should have been done for, one way or another before now."

She stopped on the landing. "There he is ; you can hear him for yourself, sir."

Mr. Conybeare was making noises which certainly suggested some wild animal rather than a human being. Dr. Manton strode into the room, and was at once assailed by a shower of curses, alternating with appeals to keep them away, not to let them come near him, these figments of his imagination, etc. etc. The patient was sitting up in bed, his fists clenched, his eyes bloodshot and staring, perspiration rolling down his cheeks in great drops and falling on the sheet. The doctor went up to him and said a

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few soothing words, which had the effect of quieting him for a time. Manton felt the sick man's pulse.

"He will die if he does not get some sleep pretty quickly. You were quite right to send for me, nurse. Even now I am not sure whether I shall be able to save him." The doctor said this in a whisper as he took a hypodermic syringe out of his bag, and proceeded to charge it with a strong solution of morphia. Mr. Conybeare yielded his arm to the doctor more easily than they expected, and after a few minutes sank back upon the bedclothes.

"Cover him up, he will soon be asleep," Manton directed. Walters threw a light counterpane over the patient while the doctor stood watching, holding Conybeare's wrist in one hand and his watch in the other. Some stertorous breathing soon indicated that the strong soporific was having the desired effect. Manton gave some further directions to the nurse and promised to call again early the following morning.

While he was speaking his attention was arrested by the sound of voices from the street outside, which came up through the open window. It was so unexpected, occurring in that deserted spot, that the doctor walked to the window and drew aside the blind.

In the street a man and a woman were standing. It was clear that the former was trying to induce the latter to do something which was directly opposed to her own wishes. It seemed so odd to Manton that these two should be having an alterca-

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tion in this forsaken spot that the affair absorbed all his attention, in a way it could not possibly have done at any other time.

Suddenly Manton saw the man raise his hand and throw something in the woman's face. She reeled and fell down almost instantaneously, clutching at the air with her hands. Manton shouted out at the top of his voice, and then rushed to the door with a view to rendering assistance. The nurse, who was attending to the patient, had seen nothing of what had happened, and was intensely surprised at the doctor's actions.

Hardly a minute had elapsed before Manton was in the street, having taken the steps from the first floor to the small hall in three strides, but it sufficed to allow the man to make himself scarce. He was nowhere to be seen. The woman lay where she had fallen. The doctor ran to her, and was shocked to see a trail, of what he felt sure must be blood, slowly finding its way in and out over the uneven surface of the road towards the lower level of the gutter by the side-walk. She must be bleeding very freely for this to be apparent, so immediately after the attack made upon her. Manton naturally came to the conclusion that she had been stabbed, and if so, the woman was probably past receiving any benefit from his skill. He bitterly regretted his giving way to the momentary impulse to shout out when he saw the deed done. Had he remained quiet the man would not have taken himself off so expeditiously. It would have been a great satisfaction

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to have caught the miscreant who could thus lift his hand to murder a defenceless woman ; the next best thing to saving the victim's life.

Manton bent over the prostrate form, and immediately made two discoveries. In the first place, the unknown was a girl in the early maturity of her womanhood ; in the second place the atmosphere even there in the open air reeked of chloroform. This made the mystery all the deeper. A man does not often, in the annals of crime, strike a blow with one hand and neutralize its hurt with the other by the administration of an anæsthetic. There is nothing new under the sun, but this seemed something very like a novelty.

Manton heard steps behind him, and turning, saw Nurse Walters, who had followed him at a more leisurely pace. It took a good deal to disturb the good woman's equanimity, or she would not have achieved her present position amongst the best known and most trusted nurses for mental cases in London. She was as calm now as if a woman, lying badly hurt in the road before her front door, was the most ordinary occurrence under the sun.

"What is the matter, Doctor Manton ?" she asked as she came to his side and bent over him. He was kneeling on one knee by the body, but had not yet commenced an investigation.

"I saw a man strike a woman as I stood at your window just now. By the smell he seems to have given her a big dose of chloroform at the same time. I cannot make it out at all." In a second he added :

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“ By Jove, this blood is not coming from a stab ; she has cut her head open by falling on one of these sharp flints of the road. Will you get me a light, nurse ? I can see pretty well, but a little more illumination would help matters considerably. You had better bring me a needle and cotton, a pair of scissors, and some sticking-plaster. It is a nasty wound, but fortunately not a dangerous one, I fancy, if we can stop the bleeding.”

While talking Manton had felt the head of the unknown with deft fingers, after moving her on to her side. The wound was a clean cut at the back of the scalp. Her hair was sodden and matted. Pressing the orifice of the wound with his strong fingers, the doctor employed the other hand in unloosing the woman's dress at the top, and as soon as this was accomplished slid his hand over the region of the heart. He was reassured by that touch. That organ was pumping furiously, in spite of the deathly paleness of the face. What she wanted, next to the closing of that ugly gap at the back of her head, was plenty of God's air, internally and externally, for her lungs and chest. Manton freed her neck and chest and unloosed the upper part of her clothing. Then he gently lifted her up from the pool of blood and the centre of that reek of chloroform, using only his right arm, still keeping the left on the cut.

Hardly had he done this than Nurse Walters arrived with the necessary appliances for binding up the wound. She was also carrying a lamp, which flickered and smoked in the light breeze of the night.

III

A DRIVE THROUGH THE NIGHT

DR. MANTON'S left hand, which was engaged in arresting the flow of blood, was stiff and almost numb with the constrained position. He was glad to release it now, and the blood spurted out afresh. With rapid and deft manipulation he cut off the luxurious hair round the cut, which must have severed a vein. Then he drew the edges of the wound together and stitched them up. Finally he neatly covered it all with plaster in strips, backwards and forwards.

"There," he said when he had finished, "I think that will do nicely. Thanks for keeping the light steady, nurse."

Walters had been looking at the patient's profile while the surgeon was busy with his work, upon which he was too much concentrated to give any of his mind and attention to anything else.

"I beg your pardon, Doctor Manton, but I think there is one point which has escaped you."

The surgeon had risen from his stooping posture, and was now on his legs again. He turned to the nurse with a gesture of surprise. "What is that?" he asked. "I think I could give evidence on every point of the case, from the moment I observed the man and woman standing facing one another until

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now. I think I could even identify the man again. He was tall and rather well built, as well as well dressed, I should say, but one of his legs was shorter than the other ; at any rate, I saw him move forwards, as she moved back a little, before he put out his hand, and he did so with a halting action, which a short leg always causes."

"Still, there is one thing, Doctor Manton, I feel sure you have not noticed," the nurse persisted. She held the light so that it fell full on the wounded girl's face. Her action suggested to the doctor to look again. That scene afterwards was so photographed in his memory that nothing else he had ever passed through could vie with it in reality. Yet at the time he little understood its import even to himself. On either side were the two rows of drab, uninteresting houses, at the end was the blank wall, overhead was the vault of the sky from which the light and warmth of the hot August day had never wholly departed. By his side stood the white-coifed, white-aproned nurse holding the lamp, which revealed—— Yes, Manton knew it now, knew what Walters had meant, when she said there was something he had not noticed.

At the doctor's feet lay the insensible form of the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. He had known that the hair was soft, silky, luxurious ; he had not noticed that it was of a rare shade of red-gold. The skin matched it. Even the all-pervading death-like pallor could not obliterate the peach-like hue and softness of that marvellous skin. But the

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crowning glory of it all was the Greek outline of forehead, nose, chin, ear, as perfect in its symmetry as any the Creator ever endowed a woman with, to the disquiet and discomfiture of man. A strange sensation came over Alec Manton, such as he had never felt in his life before. Hitherto the patient had been everything to him, the individual nothing. Now it was all changed. The patient sank into insignificance ; the woman emerged triumphant.

He turned half away, and busied himself in taking off a cuff which was stained with blood.

"Will you see to this young lady, nurse?" he said.

"Shall we take her into the house?" indicating with a gesture No. 17. "There is another bedroom I could get ready for her, and she could occupy mine in the meantime." Manton thought of the dipsomaniac in the upstairs room to whom he had just administered a strong solution of morphia, of the drunken man-servant, the deaf housekeeper. What a *ménage* into which to introduce this most delicate specimen of human china. He shrank from the idea as the veriest profanity.

"No," he said, "that will never do. I have my motor at the end of the road; you can help me to carry her to it, and she can then be taken to my home-hospital next the surgery; there are no cases in it just now. But first get some water and a sponge, and make her as presentable as possible under the circumstances."

Walters went off to do his bidding. Manton

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walked away a few paces and then waited. The stillness of the night girt him about all the more by way of contrast, as he could hear the noise of traffic from some main street in the distance. He looked down Cursitor Avenue. At the end he saw a gleaming, solitary eye. It was one of the lamps of his own victoria. Then he remembered Algernon Lysergh waiting for him all that time. Manton had completely forgotten his existence, forgotten that he had come with him, so absorbed had he been in all that had taken place.

Now it came back to him. His friend was in the motor. He and Nurse Walters would convey this woman, this girl of striking beauty, to the carriage in which sat the man who had dreamt what he had the previous night, the man who had come with him dreading the fulfilment of something, he knew not what, which his dream foreshadowed.

What would Lysergh think, and what would he say? For a moment Manton almost regretted his decision, to take the girl then and there back with him in his carriage. But what else was there to do? The alternative of leaving her at No. 17 was unthinkable. Manton decided that his friend's ultra-sensitive feelings must go to the wall. Would this be the only occasion? or was it the beginning of a long struggle between two antagonistic forces, in which the weaker would inevitably suffer? Manton was angry with himself for entertaining such thoughts for a moment. It was the result of Lysergh's stupid conversation combined with the influence of the

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sultry night and the solitude of the place. He was a man and therefore bound to succour a woman in sudden distress and danger. He was a doctor with a patient suddenly thrust upon his skill and care, without any choice or volition on his part.

No ; the deception was so flimsy and transparent Manton could not veil his face behind it for an instant. He was one throbbing under a new sensation. He had not fallen under the spell of a woman's eye ; as has man age after age since woman was formed. For in this case the blue-veined blinds were drawn, and he could not even tell what colour they might hide beneath their veiling. It was beyond analysis, contrary to reason, hateful in one sense to the strong man conquered against his will, this feeling that was his now. Would it always be his ?

Nurse Walters came and touched him on the arm. He had not heard her light step, and he started at the touch. He almost fancied for the moment——Pshaw ! what an idiot he was making of himself. This girl had absorbed enough chloroform to keep her asleep for hours, perhaps for ever.

"I have done all that was possible, Doctor, under the circumstances. The young lady ought to be taken away as soon as possible."

"Quite so. I will help you to carry her to my carriage." Manton had resumed his professional manner. Together they went back to the girl lying in the road. Walters had straightened her dress and sponged her hair, and had then coiled it up beneath

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her head. The face was waxen white, and there was not a flicker of the eyelids to indicate the tenancy of life. For a moment Manton doubted, although he had assured himself previously of the fact, that the heart was beating. He looked at Walters, who was holding the lamp.

"She must have had a very strong dose of the stuff," he said.

"Yes; whoever administered it did not mind whether the lady lived or died. He meant to quieten her, anyway. If you had not happened to see them, sir, no one knows what might have happened. I should never have heard anything. It was all done so quietly. This poor young lady could have been carried anywhere and no one the wiser."

Manton shuddered at the nurse's quiet phlegmatic working out of the affair. "Thank God," he said, "I was drawn to the window at that moment."

"You will inform the police, sir? The man ought to be looked for and punished."

Just as the words passed Walters' lips they heard the sound of footsteps approaching. Immediately afterwards two burly policemen showed themselves. They had been attracted to the spot by the lamp in the middle of the road, and had come to ascertain what was the matter.

One came straight on to the little group of three, the other stopped for a second a few yards farther down the Avenue. He picked something up, but whatever it was he immediately dropped it again.

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The serjeant, who was in front, at once accosted Manton.

"Hallo! What have we here? Has there been an accident?" The doctor stepped towards him.

"I am Doctor Manton, of Alvers Street." The policeman touched his hat.

"I beg pardon, sir. I ought to have recognized you."

"I was called here by Nurse Walters over the telephone to-night, and by accident witnessed what was nearly a murderous assault on this young lady."

The serjeant turned his bull's-eye lantern on the girl lying in the road and dropped his phlegmatic tones. "You are sure, Doctor, she is not dead?"

"Oh, no; I have ascertained that. She has absorbed through her mouth and nostrils a very strong solution of chloroform."

At this moment the second policeman came up. "Begging your pardon, Serjeant Skinner, and yours, sir, I know how it was done. I have just found a handkerchief sodden with the stuff thrown away in the road."

"What did you do with it, Downie?" the serjeant demanded with asperity.

"Dropped it again precious quick, Serjeant. The stuff was turning me giddy, and would have got to my head before I could say Jack Robinson—begging your pardon, gentlemen—as the saying is."

"That handkerchief may prove of the highest importance," Manton remarked. "But doubtless this young lady will be able to give us all the information

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we require by to-morrow or the next day, at the latest. In the meantime, Serjeant, you will see that a description of the man I saw in the road, and whose back I believe I could identify, is circulated throughout London."

"Certainly, sir." Skinner thereupon produced a notebook, and having duly entered the place and exact time by his watch, took down in laconic fashion Manton's pen portrait of the unknown aggressor—"A tall man in a frock coat and high hat, one leg slightly shorter than the other, causing a halt in his walk." No doubt every man to whom this applied in the metropolis would be under surveillance before many hours had passed.

"How about the handkerchief, Doctor? It ought not to be left behind; yet neither of us would care to take it as it is."

"I will see to that," Manton replied. Then, turning to the nurse, "Get me a pair of tongs and some of the strongest washing soda you have." The basin of water which Walters had used was still in the middle of the road. In a couple of minutes the handkerchief had been thoroughly soaked in the solution. When this was done first Manton, then the serjeant, turned it over carefully, looking at each corner severally. They could find no identification marks upon it. All that could be noted in Skinner's pocket-book was that its material was of the finest cambric, and its size indicated a man's use, not that of a woman.

"I think the man we want is a shrewd chap,

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Doctor. He knows what he is about, and takes thought beforehand."

"What makes you say that specially?"

"Well, he chose the most unfrequented road in South London, and one no policeman patrols, as it has no outlet, and he took care to do the trick with a perfectly plain handkerchief. No, sir; my opinion is that he has been 'wanted' before, and probably has not been caught as yet. I wish you had not called out, sir."

"So do I," answered Manton, "with all my heart." He was to wish it with much greater fervency later on.

The doctor and nurse took up the inanimate form of the girl between them, Manton holding her shoulders and Walters the feet, and so proceeded down Cursitor Avenue, the two policemen falling in behind. The tread of the little procession rang out when they reached the stones, which were laid more evenly where the Avenue joined the main street. It reached the ears of Algernon Lysergh, sitting waiting with tense attention in the victoria, and he jumped out to meet them, the ominous sense of something impending, which had been on him all day, and which had deepened during the prolonged delay while he sat in the motor, changing to certainty.

"What is it?" he cried in sharp tones to his friend. "What are you bringing? Ah! I knew it. I have known it all along—a woman. You told me it was a man you were coming to visit, and it has turned out to be a woman after all."

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Lysergh had worked himself into such a state that, in his feeble condition of health, he had lost all control over himself. Manton would have been very angry at the exhibition had he not felt a guilty consciousness that his friend had hit upon something very like the truth.

"I am about to drive this lady, who has been attacked in the road, to the home-hospital next the surgery. It is her only chance of life. I will explain it all afterwards to you, Algy. I had not the faintest idea of all this when I left you at this corner an hour ago."

"I can answer for that, sir," Nurse Walters put in. "It all came upon us like a thunderclap."

Lysergh turned away. "I shall get a cab and drive home," he said. "The victoria is not big enough for three of us."

"Of course it is. Don't be silly, Algy. I shall want your help with this lady, as she is quite unconscious and unable to do anything for herself."

Manton, however, was talking to deaf ears, for Lysergh had already turned away, and was hastening off, as fast as his physical disabilities allowed, towards the more frequented streets.

"The gentleman seems to be very angry," Walters remarked. "I expect you kept him waiting longer than you knew while all this was happening, and quite wore out his patience."

Manton did not take any notice of this suggestion, which was half an apology for Lysergh. He knew perfectly that his friend's petulance had its roots

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much deeper than the nurse suspected. They placed the unknown in the comfortable little victoria. Dr. Manton got in by her side. It was no easy thing to drive and at the same time see that the girl did not fall out. Yet the doctor managed it, and to tell the truth was quite sorry when he slowed up at the door of the home-hospital which abutted on to his own house and surgery. The resting of that beautiful form against his shoulder only served to deepen the impression already created. It seemed incredible that the first intoxication of love should have come to this staid, strong man in such a fashion, and that it had been roused by a girl who was found in a deep sleep of unconsciousness, who did not know of his existence, whose lips he had never heard utter a single word, and whose eyes had never looked into his own. Had Manton been told it of any one else, or read of it in a book, he would have laughed such a possibility to scorn. Yet now he knew it to be true. Gently he rested her head, which had been on his shoulder, against the cushions, and stepped out. Then he touched the button, and as soon as the bell resounded through the silent building Manton returned to the victoria, and stood with folded arms looking at the recumbent form which had so suddenly come to mean so much in his life. Now he noted for the first time that her dress and lace mantle were of the richest material, her gloves and shoes proclaimed both refinement and luxury. He had not thought of her as a woman of the people, or even as belonging

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to the middle classes, as the district in which he had first seen her would naturally suggest. Now, however, it came to him that he must place her higher in the social scale than even he had imagined before. Not only her face, with its intense refinement, but her whole costume afforded evidence of wealth and luxury. Manton did not know why, but he would have preferred it otherwise.

IV

AN EMPTY HOUSE

AFTER the doctor had departed in the motor-victoria, Serjeant Skinner set himself to begin the investigation which he hoped might end in his gaining not a little additional reputation at Scotland Yard. He had noted at once what Dr. Manton, whose feelings blunted his perceptions in one direction while they quickened them at another, had discovered much later, viz. that the victim of the affair belonged, at any rate, to the aristocracy of wealth. It was the kind of story in itself, if it got into the papers, to attract world-wide notice; but if, in addition, the lady proved to be some one of the first importance, then the kudos to be gained by unravelling the mystery would be great indeed. Skinner thanked his stars that he happened to be visiting his subordinate Downie's beat just at the right moment, and that his trained eye had noticed the lamp in the road near the upper end of Cursitor Avenue. It had always been the serjeant's principle of action to investigate anything abnormal and contrary to the expected. A light in the middle of the road, which obviously belonged to no vehicle, was abnormal. So he had headed Downie towards it with the same instinct for investigation with which a harrier finds and rouses a hare out of the form.

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Skinner had carefully taken down Dr. Manton's address in his notebook and had kept possession of the suspicious handkerchief without a name. Those were his two items of intelligence. Now he turned to Nurse Walters.

"You know nothing of this affair, Nurse, except what we have heard from the doctor, I understand?"

"Nothing at all. I have never seen a soul in the Avenue except once since Mr. Conybeare brought me here to look after him."

"Ah! You have seen some one else then in the road?" The serjeant jumped at this clue like a steel trap on a rabbit.

"Yes. I saw two men higher up the Avenue early yesterday morning, when I went to the doorstep to see if the milk had come."

"What were they like?" The serjeant had his notebook out again, while Downie held the lantern to enable him to see to write.

"I did not specially notice them beyond the fact that one was better dressed than the other, and I think that one walked a little lame, but they were gone immediately, I believe, into a house higher up."

"Oh! then there is a house occupied in the Avenue as well as the one your patient has taken, Nurse?"

"Number twenty-four has the blinds up, but I do not think any one is living in it. I judged one of the men to be the landlord."

"We will go and look at number twenty-four," the serjeant remarked.

An Empty House

"And I must be quick off to my patient," Nurse Walters put in. "I don't know what will not have happened if he should have roused up. He might kill himself, and no one would be the wiser."

"I expect the doctor gave him enough to keep him quiet until to-morrow morning," the serjeant replied reassuringly.

They all three walked up the avenue at a smart pace. Walters said good night, and turned into No. 17; the two officers went on to No. 24, which was on the opposite side of the way a little higher up.

The house was quite dark, and although there were both blinds and curtains in the windows, there was a suggestion about the whole look of the place that no one had as yet lived in it.

Skinner knocked at the door two or three times, each rap louder than the one before it, without eliciting a response. The echoes sounded hollow from the passage beyond the hall door. The serjeant turned the handle, but the door was locked.

"We must get in, Downie," he remarked. "See what the window is like. Break a pane of glass and lift the fastening."

The constable did as he was bid, but immediately he began to lift the window electric bells tinkled all over the house, and he drew his hand back as if he had been stung.

"Not got hurt, Downie?" inquired the serjeant, coming over to him.

"Feel as if I have been stung by something," the constable answered, blowing on his fingers as men do

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when either extreme of heat or cold has touched them.

"I said he was a wily customer," Skinner remarked, pleased to find another proof of his own sagacity. "He did not mean to be caught un-awares. Well, we must get in somehow. I wish I had a revolver with me. We must keep our eyes skinned, and look out for squalls." So saying, with great care and the exercise of much wariness, the serjeant slowly thrust up the lower half of the window. Then, holding his truncheon in his right hand, he turned his bull's-eye lantern with his left full inside the room. As he did so he uttered a cry of surprise, which was echoed by Downie, who was still in a state of uncertainty as to whether he was injured or not.

The room on the ground-floor had been fitted up as a chapel, with an altar at one end and kneeling-mats before it. On the altar at either side were two tall silver or plated candlesticks with candles lighted and burning in them, which some one had neglected to put out. Between the candlesticks was a book open on a stand. Beyond a strip of carpet and two ordinary chairs there was apparently nothing else in the room. Serjeant Skinner laid his hand on the window-ledge and vaulted into the apartment. The moment his feet touched the ground he felt a slight shock, and there was again a ringing of electric bells. This time the burly officer laughed. It tickled him to think what elaborate preparations had been made to prevent surprise.

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"If any one enters this show seems to me all the world is to know it," he remarked. "Come on, Downie, there's nothing here to hurt you." Stooping down, Skinner, having first wrapped his fingers in a handkerchief, severed the wire with a pair of nippers he took from his pocket.

Downie warily climbed after his superior officer. He was not afraid to tackle any man, but an insidious thing like an electric attachment did not appeal to him. Doubtful of its powers and capability of doing him an injury without any chance of retaliation, the constable preferred to leave it severely alone.

Skinner first went to the door and turned the handle. It was locked on the outside. "We must first find out," he said, "whether there is any one in the house before we investigate further. It is evident that there is more than one in this job. The cash involved must be pretty considerable, too," he added.

"How do you make that out?" Downie asked. He had a profound idea of his superior's detective skill.

"I will tell you by and by, stupid, if you can't find things out for yourself. Meantime we must get through this door." So saying, the serjeant took a large bunch of skeleton keys out of his pocket, and after trying two or three likely ones without success at length hit upon the one he wanted, and the door opened to them.

"Thoughtful of them to have taken away the key. That shows the master mind was not with them at

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the last. If it had been left in the lock we should have had to burst the door open."

The serjeant turned his bull's-eye lantern up and down the passage. There was nothing to be seen except some cobwebs, pretty high up at the corners, and a strip of matting the whole length of the floor, from the front door to one directly facing it leading out at the back. The walls were colour-washed, but not painted or papered. Not far from the back door was the commencement of a staircase, with just the bare boards uncarpeted. Opposite the apartment they had just left was another room. The two men crossed to it and threw the door open, keeping a wary eye for a possible attack. There were two camp beds in the room, and one or two pieces of furniture to match of small value, such as might form part of an officer's equipment on active service. The room was otherwise empty, and the beds had not been slept in. Skinner proceeded to look at the window fastenings after pulling up the blind. There was no electric attachment here. The whole was normal. It might have been a man's bedroom in a cheap lodging-house.

"Not much to be got out of this?" Downie suggested, looking inquiringly at his chief.

"Just as much as there is to be got out of the rest, or just as little, according as whether you have eyes to see and brains at the back of 'em to think," answered the serjeant, with enigmatic condescension. So saying, Skinner went back to the passage, and passing it to the end, beyond the commencement of

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the staircase, found two other rooms on the left-hand side, and the kitchen, pantry, etc., on the right. They glanced over the latter first. A fire was dying out in the kitchen stove; a kettle stood on the hob; there was a frying-pan inside the fender. On the sideboard were plates, dishes, glasses, etc., sufficient for four persons. The china and glass were of better value than their surroundings suggested.

"Don't that tell you anything?" Skinner inquired of Downie.

"I should say as the party as lives here is four in family, sir," the constable replied with a wink, quite pleased with his own perspicacity.

"Ah! we shall make a detective of you yet, Tom," the serjeant remarked with a superior smile. "And pray what do you make of the delf being fit for swells, since you have started figuring it up so exactly? It's wonderful, Tom, how you do put two and two together."

"Evidently they was expecting the likes of us to supper, sir," the constable suggested, and laughed till his shoulders shook at his own wit.

They went into the pantry and found it stocked with sufficient provisions to last four persons a couple of days.

"Well, if they do invite us, Tom, we shall be able to make a nice little meal before starving. It seems to me that these gentlemen must have been disturbed by what went on in the street, when our friend the doctor spoilt the show by shouting out, and they left too quickly to take anything with them.

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If they come back they will find one of us here to welcome them, eh, Downie ? ”

The constable did not quite relish the idea of remaining alone in the empty house. He had by no means got over that little electric shock he had experienced when he flung the window open.

“ It’s not likely, sir, that they would run the risk of coming back for bits of things like these.” He waved his hands towards the eatables.

“ Perhaps not, but there is the furniture and other things, not altogether to be sneezed at,” Skinner answered.

He was soon to have a much greater confirmation of the truth of his remark, for in one of the rooms opposite the kitchen they found a handsome dressing-table, with the necessary adjuncts upon it for a lady’s use. There was no superfluous ornament, only what was absolutely indispensable. Still, whoever had made the arrangements, Skinner thought, would be reluctant to abandon his property without an effort to regain it. The serjeant thought this desire would prove his opportunity, but even the shrewdest head omits something at times from his calculations. He forgot the middleman, the speculative furnisher, who is willing to take a risk for the sake of trade. This is a digression, but it may as well be set down here. On the following morning a van drove up to No. 24 Cursitor Avenue. It was the property of a second-rate but fairly well-known firm in the neighbourhood of Tottenham Court Road. Downie was in possession of the empty house, and

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declined to let the things go until Skinner had been summoned by telephone. However, neither the man in charge of the van nor the manager of the furniture warehouse would own to knowing anything of the temporary hirer of the goods. A deposit had been paid on them, in addition to the amount charged for the loan. This sum had been applied for that morning, and in consequence the firm's part of the matter was over. Nothing special had been remarked about the man who had conducted the transaction, except that he wore spectacles and had a good deal of hair about his face, beard and whiskers as well as moustache. In fact, as the serjeant remarked, he clearly wore the commonest form of disguise. One thing the manager was quite positive about, and that was that the temporary possessor of the furniture was certainly not lame. He had walked from one department to the other without any difficulty, just like other people.

This threw back the scent rather, as if the doctor was right it was not the same man who rendered the lady insensible in the street, and was then disturbed before he could carry her off, and the hairy gentleman of the shop. But then, as Skinner remarked, it had been quite obvious that there were three men in the job.

After leaving the temporary dressing-room the serjeant directed his attention to the back premises, outside the door at the end of the passage. He then saw why No. 24 had been chosen for this particular purpose. It was the only house in the street which had

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an outlet into a bypath at the back leading to some dingy meadows, the solitary vestiges of what once had been country before it was inundated by bricks and mortar. Skinner made a careful investigation of the path, but it was of hard clay, and did not yield anything to reward his efforts. The furniture had clearly not been brought in that way. It transpired afterwards that it had been at No. 24 for a fortnight before Mr. Conybeare had thought of taking No. 17, when, in fact, not a house in the avenue was occupied. No doubt the conspirators were sufficiently annoyed at this invasion subsequently, on the part of the dipsomaniac and his staff, of their private preserve.

Before leaving the house to Downie's care Skinner searched the upper rooms, and found them dusty, cobwebbed, and empty. Then he paid a final visit to the improvised chapel, which interested him more than anything else in the house. A closer inspection of the room showed a cupboard in one corner just large enough for a man to turn round in. Hanging from a peg attached to the wall was a dingy white garment, which, on investigation, proved to be a surplice. Finally the serjeant looked more carefully at the book on the altar. It was a frayed and dog-eared Prayer Book, open at the marriage service.

"I think, Tom," Skinner remarked when he noted this last piece of evidence, "that you may take it from me that the man who planned this job was a condemned scoundrel."

"I should just say so," assented his subordinate.

V

IN THE HOME-HOSPITAL

THAT part of Alvers Street in which Dr. Manton's house, and the home-hospital adjoining it, were situated had exceptional advantages, considering their proximity to some of the busiest and most crowded parts in that district of South London.

Dr. Manton had selected Alvers Street as his head-quarters because the houses possessed these particular attractions. The front looked out on a quiet thoroughfare of great respectability, but it was at the back that the distinctive features already alluded to were to be found. In the centre of the open space, bounded by houses on both sides, was an enclosure of considerable dimensions. It was surrounded by iron railings, with gates at intervals commanded by private keys in the possession of the occupiers of the contiguous houses. In this enclosure were shrubs and trees of great variety and beauty, with here and there strips of grass carefully cut and trimmed ; it formed a paradise of green, refreshing to the eye and beneficial to the lungs.

In front of the first-floor windows of the doctor's house and of the home-hospital next to it ran a broad balcony which commanded a view of this oasis. It was a great assistance to convalescence at the

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home-hospital to be thus situated. Sofas and deck chairs were brought out on to the balcony for the use of patients, who could spend many hours of the day in the open air without fatigue. Dr. Manton believed far more in those twin specifics, fresh air and rest, than he did in all the medicines of the pharmacopœia.

Throughout the greater part of the year the half-dozen or so suites of rooms in the home-hospital were in great request. In fact, patients often had to wait a certain time before they could obtain admission, and Manton was endeavouring to obtain a lease of the adjoining property, in order to extend his hospitality to a larger number of those soliciting his skill. This was in spite of the fact, that the charges for accommodation and treatment were such as only people with long purses and ample means could sustain with equanimity. Dr. Manton kept his charges high so as not to interfere with the more general hospitals in the vicinity. In the months of August and September, however, there were always fewer inmates. At this particular time it so happened, when Dr. Manton brought his new patient home in the victoria, there was not a single other case under treatment, an unprecedented event.

Presiding over the establishment was a Mrs. Dundas, herself the widow of a medical practitioner, whose services Dr. Manton had been only too pleased to secure. She was able to manage both nurses and servants, and to take many details into

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her own hands, which otherwise would have fallen upon the doctor himself. He paid her a handsome salary, which was thoroughly well earned. Mrs. Dundas was only too glad to welcome the new arrival, as she disliked exceedingly the house being empty, the servants having more time on their hands than they knew what to do with.

Early on the following morning Dr. Manton passed through the door in the walled partition, which admitted him from his own quarters to the hospital under his charge. He had had a restless night, a thing quite unusual with him. He could not explain to himself why it was, that the events of the preceding night had laid such a hold upon his imagination as to interfere with his normal powers of sleep.

Of course, it was all sufficiently unusual, but that fact alone could not account for the disturbance of his mental equilibrium. He had been personally moved in a way which no previous experience could have led him to anticipate.

Mrs. Dundas met the doctor at the foot of the stairs.

"How is our patient this morning?" Manton inquired.

"She has not roused herself in the slightest," the housekeeper replied.

The doctor was not a little surprised. He had expected a return to full consciousness. The unknown had been placed in the pleasantest suite of rooms in the hospital. The sitting-room and bedroom com-

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municated with one another, and the windows of both apartments opened on to the balcony.

Dr. Manton passed in with Mrs. Dundas, and crossing the sitting-room entered the sleeping apartment beyond. As he turned the handle Manton again felt something stirring within him, which betokened an interest other than professional.

A brief examination showed that Mrs. Dundas was quite right. The girl lay in deep torpor, her breathing alone proving that she was alive. Her face was destitute of colour, the blue veins showing distinctly through the transparent skin; the red-gold hair lay in profusion on the dainty pillow. Evidently the combination of the chloroform administered, and the great loss of blood caused by the cut at the back of the head, when she fell in the road, had affected the brain, but to what extent Manton was unable to determine.

Twice again during the day the doctor visited his patient without noticing any change. Mrs. Dundas had managed to get her to swallow a little liquid nourishment, but beyond that nothing had transpired.

Manton went his rounds thinking far more of what he had left behind than what he was doing. He felt that his position with regard to his new patient was a very responsible one, and before the afternoon waned he had made up his mind to ask a specialist to see the case, unless some decided change took place by the next day.

At 10 a.m. on the following morning he sent a

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telephone message to Sir Manvers Hollis, of 105 Cavendish Square, asking him to call at the home-hospital as soon as was convenient. Sir Manvers was considered the greatest authority living with reference to diseases of the brain, and Manton had the highest opinion of the great doctor's skill and judgment.

Hollis appointed 12.30 as the hour for the consultation, and punctually at that time drove up in his brougham. Manton was waiting for him. He first took him into his own consulting-room, and there related very briefly how the case had come into his hands. Sir Manvers displayed great interest in the story.

"You say," he said, "that the girl is of exceptional beauty, and that her dress betokens a position in life above the common. I cannot understand how it is that by this time no hue-and-cry has been raised with regard to her disappearance. A woman of the people may disappear and little may be heard of it, but those in our own rank of life, especially a young lady such as you describe, are generally too well guarded for such a thing to happen without some notoriety. I should have thought by this time the papers would have been full of your patient's disappearance."

"I should have thought so, too, but I think I can safely assume that nothing of the kind has occurred. I have placed sufficient of the details in the hands of the principal press-cutting agencies, with strict injunctions to have all the London and provincial

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journals in Great Britain and Ireland searched for any reference, either in the news or advertising columns, of the disappearance. I have just heard from them, over the telephone, that nothing has transpired, nor have the police been any more successful in tracing the girl's assailant. He has got off 'scot-free,' and by this time has no doubt reached a place of safety, out of the way of the investigation which he must have anticipated."

"Don't you think, Manton, you ought to let some account of the affair be made public, or to advertise it yourself, at any rate in the London Press? I should in your case," Sir Manvers suggested.

"I would rather not take either course for the present," Dr. Manton replied. "There is some deep mystery connected with the story, I feel sure, and until this young lady has roused herself from the stupor which now overpowers her faculties, and can express her own wishes in the matter, I do not feel justified in giving her story, or the small part of it with which we are acquainted, to the world. It is just the sort of narrative which the more sensational papers would dearly like to get hold of, and readers in search of a little excitement would devour the details, garnished and served up, as we can understand they would be, with the greatest avidity. A lady of gentle birth and breeding, which I am quite sure my patient is—and I know you will agree with me, Sir Manvers, when you see her—would shrink from such a thing more than anything in the whole world. The story would cling to her for the rest of her life, and

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she would always regard me as the vehicle responsible for its publication. I have known other cases where great harm has been done by the Press getting to know of matters which it would have been much better, for all the parties concerned, if they had never been made public. I have thought this matter over night and day ever since I brought the girl here, and the more I think of it the less I am inclined to take the world into my confidence." Dr. Manton spoke in very decided tones.

"There is certainly a good deal to be said for your view of the matter, Manton," Sir Manvers agreed. "On the other hand, I cannot help thinking, that there must be some people in a terrible state of anxiety about this young lady's sudden disappearance. You found her in the most unfrequented spot. You carried her away without communicating with any one except the police and this Nurse Walters. No one could possibly trace what had happened to her unless they inquired at Bow Street, a course which this girl's friends may have reasons of their own from adopting. There is generally some disgrace at the back of a mystery, and naturally a respectable family would shrink from endangering its reputation by informing the public authorities, until all private means of inquiry had been exhausted without result. There is also another side of the question to be taken into consideration—namely, justice. Some villain is going scot-free while you are holding your hands, and not taking a very obvious means of discovering him through the newspapers."

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“ I have thought of both sides,” Manton answered. “ If any one is anxious, he or she could advertise in such a way that no one not in the secret would be the wiser, and I have ascertained, as far as a very clever agency can answer for it, that no such veiled advertisement has appeared in any paper published in the three kingdoms. With regard to the other matter, that of bringing the assailant to justice, a full description, as far as it could be given with the materials in our possession, has been circulated throughout all the police stations in connection with Bow Street. The ports especially have been warned, so that officers might be on the look out for some one of gentlemanly bearing with some physical deformity in his gait. Nothing has resulted so far, but the police seem confident that the meshes of their net are too fine for any one to escape through them. There is one element in the affair, Sir Manvers, which makes me more particularly cautious in dealing with it.”

“ What is that ? ” the great physician asked.

During the latter part of their conversation the two men had left the doctor's consulting-room and had gone together to the patient's room in the home-hospital. They entered the latter before Manton had had time to reply.

Sir Manvers walked up to the bed, and was at once obviously struck with the beauty of the patient, about whom he was called in to give his professional advice. She was lying on her side in the same motionless way she had done from the beginning. He

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raised one eyelid after the other, disclosing eyes of a forget-me-not colour, but which gave no answering look in response to Sir Manvers' fixed regard. After making a careful inspection Hollis went down to the foot of the bed, leant his arms on the brass railing, and stood looking and thinking. Then he remembered the fact that Dr. Manton had not answered the question which had been put just as they entered the bedroom.

"You were saying," he remarked to Manton, who was standing by the side of the bed, "that there was another element in the affair besides those you have mentioned previously."

"Yes," Manton answered. "The serjeant who is in charge of the investigation, and who seems an intelligent man, informs me that the police discovered evidence of an intention, to have some sort of a marriage ceremony performed in the only other house in Cursitor Avenue which showed signs of any occupation—number twenty-four. The police believe that the house had been taken for this express purpose."

Sir Manvers whistled. When Manton spoke he had turned towards him; now his eye rested once more, with an even added interest, on the patient lying in the bed before him. As he did so he thought that he noticed a slight flickering of the eyelids and a tiny tinge of colour upon the girl's white cheek. Her breath, too, seemed to come and go rather differently than it had done heretofore, when he had examined her a few minutes earlier. It might, of

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course, only be due to the intermittent attack of febrile symptoms, induced by what she had gone through. On the other hand, Sir Manvers was inclined to ask himself whether the girl was really so dead to what was going on, so unconscious of what they were saying, as the doctors had hitherto imagined to be the case. In a second or two the trace of emotion he had noticed had disappeared, but the quick and observant eye of the great physician, trained to take into consideration the very smallest details, was rarely wrong. Sir Manvers did not believe that he had been deceived by any process of imagination. Near to the two medical men was a french window opening on the balcony. Without uttering a word, but just giving a slight gesture of invitation to Dr. Manton to follow him, Sir Manvers walked to the window and stepped out. Dr. Manton followed. The balcony itself was in the shade, while the space and the trees in front were bathed in the hot noon-tide sunshine.

“You are fortunately placed here,” Sir Manvers remarked, looking out over the trees in the space between the houses. “I had no idea you had anything like this at the back.”

“I chose Alvers Street when I settled here, half a dozen years ago, for my own house and the hospital because of this very outlook. It is pleasant at all times of the year, and affords a soothing prospect to those who come here needing rest.”

“I quite agree with you,” Sir Manvers answered. “It is a treatment in itself, of which in our days we

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are only beginning to realize the value. I called you out of the room just now because I wanted to say something which I could not well say before the patient."

"I should have thought you could have said anything you liked," Dr. Manton interrupted.

"There I think you are making a mistake. Whatever condition this girl may have been in hitherto, I fancy now that she is conscious, or shall I say sub-conscious, and takes in, at any rate, to a certain extent, what is done and said in her presence."

"What made you think so?" Alec inquired eagerly.

"I saw a slight and passing emotion, very slight, but still observable, when you said something just now to me. The word 'marriage,' I fancy, penetrated to her brain."

"Neither Mrs. Dundas nor I have had the faintest idea of such a thing, but for the future I will have her even more carefully watched, and, at any rate, I am very much obliged to you for the hint as to being cautious in talking before her."

"But now as to this story of a secret wedding in a private house. Surely it could not be valid in any way? I don't know much about the law, and I know these things are habitually done in America, but I fancied in England the thing was almost, if not quite, out of the question."

"I thought so, too; but, at any rate, the police have collected conclusive evidence that some such thing was intended. A room in the house had been

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rigged up with all the outward appearance of a chapel, such as I have seen in some nobleman's hall in the country. There was an altar with candles burning, a Prayer Book open at the commencement of the marriage service, and last, but not least, a frayed and dirty surplice hanging in a cupboard."

Sir Manvers raised his eyebrows. "That certainly seems to point to the conclusion the police have come to. Some extraordinary plot was obviously hatched. You certainly intervened at a most opportune moment for that poor girl."

"I only wish I had caught the rascal, as I should have done if I had not called out on the spur of the moment."

"No one could have helped doing it; I am sure I should myself. I hope one day you will be able, Manton, to unravel all the threads of this mystery, and to give me the *dénouement* of the story. It should be more interesting than half the fiction of the present day."

"I hope I shall," Alec assented. "It is the one object of my life now to find out with what this girl is threatened, and to deliver her from it."

"You are very deeply interested in this matter, Manton. I never saw you so interested before, and I have known you a good many years."

Manton flushed, and then turned a trifle pale. He would have resented the remark from some men, but Sir Manvers Hollis was a privileged person in his eyes. He had always had a great veneration for him, such as a young man feels for an older one

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whose skill and acquirements in a special line are unique and outstanding.

There was a pause ; then Alec answered in deep, quiet tones—

“ You are right, Sir Manvers, I do take the deepest interest in the unravelling of this thread of mystery. It has suddenly sprung into the first importance in the scheme of my life. If this girl is permanently injured, which God forbid ”—for a moment Alec’s strong, clear voice faltered—“ I will leave no stone unturned to bring her cowardly assailant to justice, and the punishment he deserves.” His tone had grown firm again. “ If she lives, and regains her health and strength under my hands, I shall never be thankful enough to God for His mercy.”

Sir Manvers laid a touch of sympathy on the younger man’s arm.

“ I do not think you need fear any permanent injury either to her intellect or to her bodily strength and health. What she has passed through and suffered, together with the accident to her head, are quite sufficient to account for this prolonged unconsciousness. She only needs absolute rest and care, and to be kept free from every form of disturbance or excitement. Unless I am greatly mistaken, she will soon begin to recover, and ere long retrieve the health she has habitually enjoyed. Her physique strikes me as exceptionally good. I should say that naturally she has a healthy mind in a healthy body. Above all, of course, the great thing to be avoided is anything which refers, either directly

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or indirectly, to what happened that night in Cur-sitor Avenue ; I mean when she is beginning to regain her strength. You must also be very careful now not to talk before her about these things. Even if she is not absolutely conscious, memory may be recording. It is a very curious thing ; I have noticed it frequently in my practice. There is hardly any part of us the functions of which we understand so little at present as those of memory. When her brain begins to stir, things said during her mental sojourn in the mysterious borderland of unconsciousness, or of semi-consciousness—through which, if my impressions are right, she is passing at the present time—are very likely to come back to her. I have had a great deal of experience in these matters, as you know, and I assure you, Manton, that you cannot be too careful what is said in her presence even when you think that she is incapable of taking any notice or of recording any impressions. We will go in now," he added, "and I will write you a prescription which will tend to strengthen her brain and yet soothe her disturbed nerves."

"Thank you," Manton said. "You have been the greatest comfort and assistance to me."

The two doctors did not return through the bedroom, but walking along the balcony entered the sitting-room. Here Sir Manvers wrote his brief directions. When he had finished he looked round the room. "This is a comfortable apartment," he said, "and very bright, just as it should be. I hope

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your patient will soon be well enough to come in here of her own accord."

"I hope so, too, with all my heart."

Sir Manvers Hollis descended to his carriage, Manton accompanying him. The physician gave an instruction to his coachman, then shook hands with Manton, and drove away. He did not immediately dismiss the scene he had just visited and the remarkable story he had listened to from his memory; on the contrary, it kept on recurring to him throughout the days that followed. Sir Manvers had a great regard for Manton, and rather enjoyed weaving a romance on his behalf.

Besides, the girl was curiously beautiful, and the pathetic appeal of her plight was not without its effect on the chivalry of the man.

VI

LYSERGH VISITS THE DOCTOR

AFTER Sir Manvers Hollis had departed Dr. Manton stood for a few moments, his hands in the pockets of his short coat, looking up the road after the retreating carriage. He was thinking of the great doctor's verdict, which had infused new hope of the recovery of the patient, about which Manton had begun to have his doubts. He recognized that Sir Manvers Hollis' pronouncement was a much more impartial one than his own reading of the case. He himself no longer looked upon the girl as an ordinary patient ; she had become to him something infinitely more. This personal equation disturbed the balance of his judgment. He saw less clearly because he feared the more. He had been haunted with the terrible doubt whether the mind had not altogether fled from the beautiful casket.

After three or four minutes he went back again into the home-hospital, mounted the staircase, and, passing through the sitting-room in which Sir Manvers had written the prescription, went and stood once more on the balcony. He wished, as it were, to hear once more, on the very same spot, the words of assurance and hope which the physician had spoken. As he stood there he turned over in his mind the whole purport of the conversation they had just had

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together. He asked himself once more the questions he had had to face again and again during these last few days and feverish nights, and which Sir Manvers had put to him very clearly, and accentuated in his quiet, effective way. Was he, Dr. Manton, right in keeping this matter quiet? Was he helping to defeat the ends of justice? Still more, was he perhaps causing very great anxiety to some persons unknown, near and dear to the girl whom he had taken under his charge, and whom he was so jealously guarding?

Jealousy! Yes, he owned to himself, that was the very word. He hated to think that he might have to part at a moment's notice with this girl, whose life he had saved, and whom he had brought home in his arms. He reasoned to himself that if her friends were found they would almost certainly wish to remove her—either to take her to her own home or, if that was out of the question, to place her at the West End under the personal care and supervision of some great specialist like the man who had just left him. He, Manton, was known to a wide district as a very skilled general practitioner. His reputation had grown from day to day since he first established himself, only a few years back, in Alvers Street; but that is a very different matter in the eyes of the world at the present time, as the doctor well knew, to a consulting physician, who, having devoted all his energies and studies towards mastering one small portion of the human frame, had achieved a world-wide reputation. He argued to himself that the friends of this girl were certainly

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wealthy, and that money would not be stinted in doing all for her they thought advisable.

No, he could not part with her ; he could not take steps which would in all human probability lead to such a catastrophe. This girl had taken possession of him, of his very life, had absorbed his whole mind ; a week ago he could not have believed such a thing possible—he would have laughed such a suggestion to scorn. Just as he was arriving at these conclusions a man-servant appeared on the balcony at the farther end and came towards him.

“ Well, what is it, Harris ? ”

“ Mr. Lysergh to see you, sir. I have shown him into the study.”

“ Thank you. I will be there directly.”

For the first time it came across Alec, that he had not seen his friend for the longest time since they had both been located in London. Lysergh, who as a rule came every day, had not called in Alvers Street since they parted at the end of Cursitor Avenue—not really long ago, yet an infinitude of feeling had passed since that fateful night. The doctor owned to himself, with a sense of contrition, that he had never even given Lysergh a thought, never even missed him. This fact showed him, more than anything else, how far he had travelled during these last brief hours from the past of his life. He had come, mentally, to the cross-roads, and had followed one that turned away at right angles from the old, frequented path, as swiftly as his own motor could do on the ordinary highways. For the first time the

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dream Lysergh had related to him returned to Manton's mind. He had treated it all lightly enough, laughed at it, in fact. Was he not now suffering the nemesis of his own disdain? In that dream there had been two things—the coming of a woman to him, and his own separation from her. The former had been marvellously fulfilled; how about the latter? Would that come true, too? Manton, there in the hot August midday sunlight, shivered palpably. He ejaculated to the silent space before him, “God forbid!”

This last fear influenced his next action. He did not go, as his impulse had been at first, straight to his own house to meet his friend, but instead stepped back into the bedroom. It almost seemed as if he would assure himself of the actual presence of the girl in her own apartment. In that, at any rate, as yet the dream had not fulfilled itself.

He looked at the bed anxiously, and was reassured. The girl lay there in the same deep sleep of unconsciousness as when he and Sir Manvers Hollis consulted together in her presence. There was no one else in the room besides himself—and her.

Just off the larger apartment there was a small ante-room, which was used as a kind of invalid kitchen for the patient occupying that particular suite of rooms. In the ante-room was a gas-stove where dishes, suitable for invalid dietary, could be cooked or kept warm without recourse being necessary to the general kitchen in the basement

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of the hospital. Dr. Manton could hear the nurse in attendance moving about in this *annexe*, no doubt getting ready some broth for her charge. The door was nearly closed, so that the nurse was not actually visible. The doctor was glad that her temporary absence left him alone with the slight form resting in the big bed. Manton looked with long and earnest gaze at the still face, so classically beautiful, resting on the pillow, surrounded by the luxury and the glory of the abundant hair. The deathly white hue which had marked the skin when he first saw it had now given place to a faint tinge of colour, which set off the ivory tint of her ears and forehead. As Manton looked at her her innocence, purity, and helplessness seemed to lift him up to a higher and more ethereal region than he had ever attained to in his busy, humdrum life before. He had always regarded women, as has been said, from a lofty standpoint, as something "too good for human nature's daily food"; now this feeling deepened and intensified. He stood at the foot of the bed, quiet, holding his breath, a sort of awe upon him. He appeared to be in a kind of trance. He felt that this girl so near physically was spiritually far removed from him, apart, exalted. Dr. Manton could not believe that he would ever hear her speak, that he would ever be able to tell her what she was to him.

Then a new idea obsessed him. It seemed strange that even in imagination and in recollection, when away from her, he could not give her a name. Mrs. Dundas had shown him on the first morning that a

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monogram was worked on all her things. The initials were not quite clear, as they were in Roman lettering worked with some superabundance of complicated embroidery, but they looked like "M. G." "M. G."—that was all he knew. Some day he would learn her name, perhaps call her by it ; some day he would utter it in his prayers. Of late he had almost forgotten to pray ; now he felt the need of it as much as he had done in the far-away days of his childhood. No, he had to own to himself, he knew nothing of this girl except that he had saved her life perhaps, at any rate from the shadow of a hateful tie, in itself a moral degradation. At this remembrance his mood changed ; he thought of the scoundrel who had woven some dastardly plot against this beautiful life. Manton clenched his fist—he longed to have him there, to strike him to the ground. The doctor must have said something out loud, although he was not conscious of the fact, for suddenly the girl opened her eyes. A glance of intelligence swept the room, and then settled on his face. She smiled ; surely she smiled when she looked at him. It was the first gleam of knowledge, of returning mental power, that he had seen in those glorious eyes.

Manton, under the influence of he knew not what, took two or three steps round the bed and extended his arms. The look he had intercepted had, however, passed from the face, the eyes had closed once more. With an effort Manton mastered himself and turned back towards the door.

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At that moment the nurse entered the apartment with a cup of something hot steaming in her hand.

Dr. Manton gave one or two directions to the nurse, and then left the room. On the stairs he met Mrs. Dundas. She stopped him to ascertain the opinion of Sir Manvers Hollis.

"I hope the verdict was satisfactory, Doctor?"

"Yes, decidedly, on the whole. He thinks that rest and time, with a prescription he has given, will work wonders. I am inclined to think that he is right. I fancied that I noticed just now the gleam of some awakening intelligence in the eyes of the patient."

"I hope so, I am sure," the matron responded. "It would be a terrible blow for one so young to lose her reason or to become a permanent invalid."

Manton felt himself turn pale at these suggestions crudely put into words by Mrs. Dundas.

"Heaven forbid!" he said. "I trust that will be averted. By the by, Sir Manvers warned me to be very careful about what we said in her presence. He thinks she may hear and even understand more than we imagine. If she does not understand it now she might remember it afterwards. Above all, there must be no reference to the events which brought about her illness. Even if she recovers sufficiently to ask you questions on the subject, Mrs. Dundas, you must put her off with as few details as possible. In her weak state realizing what she suffered would very likely bring about a relapse."

"I will see that your directions are attended to,"

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the matron replied. "I will also warn the nurse, although I think that she has had no history of the case before it was placed in her hands."

"I must hurry away ; Mr. Lysergh is waiting for me in the library."

The doctor rapidly crossed the division between the two houses. When he laid his hand on the handle of the snugger door Manton paused. Until now he had been full of the thoughts of other things which had occupied his whole attention. At this moment he realized how entirely he had neglected the friend of so many years' standing. Lysergh had indeed some cause to be annoyed with him. They had parted almost in anger, yet Manton had taken no steps to smooth over the difference between them. He knew his friend's sensitive temperament. Always before it had been the doctor who had prevented any little divergence between them widening into a chasm. Manton, with his splendid health and absolute control over himself, was the stronger vessel. He had always felt it incumbent upon him to remember, and make allowances for the weak physique and highly strung nervous organism of Algernon Lysergh. Now, at the most critical moment in their friendship, he had failed to stretch out his hand, not because of any resentment, but through sheer forgetfulness, through the preoccupation brought about by the extraordinary chain of events which had wound round his life. All this only proved to him more than ever how deeply his own feelings were involved. Summoning up his

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determination not to let any friction arise between himself and his friend, as far as he individually could help it, the doctor opened the door and entered the room.

Lysergh was sitting not, as usual, in his favourite easy chair, but on one of the ordinary seats which formed the complement of the suite, to fill up the room, not for general use. The difference, exceedingly trivial as it was, Manton knew marked the condition of Lysergh's feelings. When he glanced at the latter's face his heart went out to him. The record of what he was suffering and had suffered was so clearly marked. Manton went up to his friend with both his hands stretched out towards him.

"Algy, what is the matter? You are looking really ill." So saying, he took Lysergh's long, thin hand into both his strong palms. There was a great contrast between the hands of the two men, just as great as there was between their respective characteristics. The hand is an index of character, almost, if not quite, as faithful as the eye.

"Of course I am ill," Lysergh answered. "How long is it since I have seen you, Alec? Is it days, or weeks, or years? I cannot tell." He passed his left hand over his brow wearily. "I have not slept an hour since that night when we parted. How could I fail to be ill?" He drew his hand away petulantly, and gazed into his friend's face with pathetic large brown eyes, under which great circles had deepened.

"Why have you not come to me?" Manton in-

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quired with soothing intonation. "You know how busy I have been, and that I could not possibly come to you."

As a matter of fact, Manton rarely went to Lord Caston's town residence in Hyde Park Gardens. Although Lysergh had a latch-key and a private door, there was no servant specially told off to wait upon that entrance. The formality which attended a visitor at the hall door—butler and footmen, with all the routine of announcement—choked Manton off. Added to this, his time, except for an hour or two in the evening, was rarely at the doctor's absolute disposal.

"I did not come because I knew you did not want me——"

"What humbug," Manton interrupted.

"At any rate, you did not need me, Alec," Lysergh insisted. He sat forward and twisted his long fingers in and out and over one another in his nervousness, as he gazed searchingly into the doctor's face to read the confirmation there of his own fears. "Tell me truly, have you missed me at all? have you given me even a thought during these long hours of nights and days, which have been like a nightmare to me, and have passed like a dream to you? A dream!" he cried. "Ah! I told you mine; it was more than a dream—it was a vision. It has all come true, and if not all yet, it will!"

Manton winced. He remembered what he had thought a few minutes before on the balcony.

Lysergh, noticing that he received no response,

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went on more vehemently : " I had a foreboding it would when I told my dream to you ; that woman you carried in your arms "—Lysergh got up and paced the room—" she has come in to mar our friendship ; she has thrust herself between you and me. We shall never be the same to each other again—never ! never ! And I, what am I to do ? I would rather die than lose you ! " Algy's voice was choked with sobs. His face was averted ; he seemed alike incapable of looking at his friend or of restraining his own outburst.

Manton went up to him and took him by the arm. " Look here, Algy, you are talking nonsense. I am not a man to change, as you must know. Our friendship is of too long standing, is far too deeply rooted in the soil of both our natures to be easily disturbed, still less dissolved into thin air. We love each other, we always shall love each other ; but it is as friend to friend. There is room in a man's heart, surely, for other feelings, other emotions, than those of friendship ? " Manton's voice changed for a moment to a softer cadence than it had ever had before, a note that would have gone to a woman's heart. " A man," he said, " has a capacity, is made, for another love besides friendship, which is a thing apart. The two things, surely, can exist side by side ? They have done in a million instances since the world began ; they do not clash because their essence is different."

" Love ! " Lysergh exclaimed, turning upon Manton almost fiercely. " You said the word love. Can

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it possibly be that it has come to that already ? Tell me, I can bear the worst ; I would rather know all than suffer the suspense I am enduring. Ah ! ”—he clenched his thin fist—“ what I have endured God only knows.”

Manton had to exercise great restraint over himself so as not to answer his friend with hot words like his own. He well knew the laceration of Lysergh’s feelings, and the physical strain he was enduring through lack of sleep and mental tension acting on that feeble physique ; he was determined to keep his own tongue under strong control.

“ Sit down, Algy,” he said. “ I will go and mix you a draught. It is not the first time,” he added playfully, “ that I have been your doctor, as well as your friend, and you must be my patient once more.”

“ A draught, a dose of medicine to cure a heart-ache ? That is just like you doctors. I tell you, only a draught from Lethe’s stream, and that a deep and satisfying one, would cure what I am enduring here.” Lysergh struck his head with his open hand.

Manton did not reply in so many words, but at once left the room. He went to the surgery, and returned in a few minutes with a measure-glass in his hand half full of a colourless liquid. Lysergh, in the meantime, had gone to his usual place in the arm-chair, which Manton was pleased to see. It augured well that the worst of the storm had spent itself.

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"Here is Doctor Manton's prescription for you, Algy." So saying, he handed the glass to him. "Drink it right down."

Lysergh took the draught into his hand, and held it for a minute, looking into Manton's eyes.

"I could almost wish it was strychnine," he exclaimed, with a wry face.

"You cannot be sure it is not," Manton answered, with a half-smile flitting about his lips. "Don't you know that strychnine is one of the most valuable drugs in our medicine-chest? We use a great deal of it. Come, drink it down, whatever it is," Manton urged, as Lysergh still seemed to hesitate. Algy did as he was bid.

"It does go down hot and comforting, Alec," he said. "I believe if you abandon me I shall take to drinking."

Manton was standing by the open window. He had been looking out, making up his mind what he should say to his friend, and, before doing so, he had to consider what the exact state of his own feelings was. Now he turned to Lysergh again.

"Don't talk such nonsense. In the first place, you may rest assured that I shall certainly not abandon you; and in the second place, as to taking to alcohol as a solace, the remedy, I assure you, is fallacious. Opium is a stage nearer to the realization of Nirvana; but even from that there is an awakening, when the tortures of the mind are intensified tenfold. No, dear friend, live the life you have always lived; if other conditions have come in—

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and, mind you, I do not deny that to a certain extent they have—let us face them together. After all, what is the test of friendship? not, surely, when we are sailing over summer seas with a favourable wind behind us, in a recognized direction to a desired haven; but when the storm-clouds are lowering, when there are breakers before and behind us, when it needs the grip of one man's hand upon the other, to enable both to face with courage and determination that which lies before them."

Lysergh's face had flushed under the influence of Manton's earnest exhortation.

"If you appeal to me like that," Algy said, "you will not appeal in vain."

"I know that," the doctor answered. "I need a friend's help and sympathy in a way, and to an extent, I have never needed it before. Friendship is worth nothing if it will not stand the strain of an emergency. Why, then, it is not friendship at all, it is just selfishness parading under a specious cloak, behind a beautiful name."

Lysergh got up and grasped his hand. "You are right," he said. "I have been acting, and talking, like a petulant child, not like a grown man. I have shut myself up, doubted you, and kept apart; when I ought to have trusted you, Alec, and been by your side. Command me now, and in whatever way I can be of service; there will be nothing left undone, I promise you, on my part."

"Thanks, old friend, I accept the offer with all my heart." Manton laid his hand on Lysergh's

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shoulder. "I never really doubted you, you know that; I knew you would not fail me. We have known each other too intimately and too long for that."

"Now tell me all."

Manton hesitated. He did not answer for a minute or two. He was wondering exactly how he should put the communication, for, to say the truth, the whole affair was so indefinite in his own mind, that he hardly knew how to express it to any one else.

Lysergh misinterpreted the silence. "Would you rather not tell me, Alec? Don't if you think you had better not." The speaker's face had fallen.

"It is not that; I was wondering for a moment how I should put it."

"Shall I do that for you?" Lysergh suggested, with just a shade of irony in his tone. "You have fallen in love with your beautiful patient, and she, very naturally, has reciprocated the feeling."

"I have never spoken to her; she has not spoken to me, or, indeed, to any one. In fact, she is still unconscious."

Lysergh looked at him in surprise. This was quite another condition of affairs from any he had imagined during his hours of self-torture.

"I do not understand," he said.

"Part of what you suggested just now is true. I have taken this girl into my heart. She has stirred me as I have never been stirred before; yet

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I do not know her name, and her past, whatever it may be, is wrapped in mystery."

He then proceeded to tell him about the police discoveries at the only other occupied, or at any rate tenanted, house in Cursitor Avenue, and about the consultation he had had with Sir Manvers Hollis.

Lysergh listened intently. A barrister by profession, although it is true he had never practised, his interest was naturally greater in the first part of Manton's disclosures than it was in the second.

"I do not like the story at all," he said. "I am inclined to think that there is some dark secret in the background, and, if your feelings are involved, this affair may cause you a great deal of trouble and anxiety."

"I quite see that. I am prepared to face it. My feelings are involved; I hardly yet know, I think, how much. At the same time, whatever secret there may be at the back of it all, I am perfectly certain that it has not affected the nature of my patient. No one could look at her without feeling that she is a girl of gentle breeding, and of a noble and exalted nature, pure as the undriven snow."

"If that is the case, the rest matters but little. If there is a plot, as there seems to be, against the happiness of this girl, you will have to bring your strength to bear on her behalf; she is fortunate to have found such a friend. I, on my part, will, most willingly, render any assistance in my power. I could do nothing for you if it were a matter of

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physical conflict, but if it becomes a question of pitting brain against brain, I may be able to give some assistance."

"I cannot tell you, old friend, what it will be to me to have some one in whom I can trust, to whom I can tell my inmost feelings, and who will give me brotherly sympathy and advice."

"You may rely on me, Alec, that no personal selfishness will ever again warp my feelings and judgment in this new relationship which has come into your life."

There are moments when the depths of a man's nature stand revealed, as sometimes the clear light of day will shine into the deepest pools and show the recesses at the bottom. Never before had Manton realized the true strength and beauty of his friend's character. The very event which had seemed likely to separate them, or, at any rate, to minimize their feeling of friendship, had produced the opposite effect. They were drawn together, instead of being driven asunder. The cementing tie was the generosity of Lysergh's nature.

VII

A VISION BY DAYLIGHT

DR. MANTON was greatly relieved by the turn the conversation had taken with his friend. He had anticipated much greater difficulty in inducing him to see matters from his own standpoint. To tell the truth, the doctor could not help owning to himself that his position was a singularly weak one from a logical point of view. It seemed verging upon the absurd and grotesque to have to own himself in love with a woman to whom he had never spoken, and whose name was as yet an unknown quantity. But feelings are not subject to the ordinary laws of logic. Manton had first acknowledged this to himself, and then had the satisfaction of achieving the result that Lysergh should acquiesce in it too.

He now walked to the mantelpiece and took a pipe from the rack. He felt the need of its soothing influence. Over the mantelshelf was a fine piece of plate glass, embellished with a handsomely carved oak frame. An inscription, in silver lettering at the foot, stated that it was a thank-offering from a grateful patient. The doctor had received it a few months previously.

As Manton stood at one corner, he could see the

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garden space, which occupied, as has been said, the central part of the square opposite the houses in Alvers Street, reflected in it. A light breeze was waving the branches of the trees, and causing the leaves to flutter up and down. Manton was lighting his pipe, and yet could see the picture thus presented out of the corner of his eye. Suddenly his attention was arrested. With an exclamation, he dropped his pipe on the hearthrug. Some of the just-lighted strands of tobacco falling upon the dry wool-work before the fireplace ignited it. Manton did not see it. He had swung round, and was looking out of the window, his whole attention absorbed in this concentrated gaze. Lysergh was not so occupied; he at once sprang to the spot, and, stamping on it, succeeded in putting out the incipient fire, although it continued to smoulder and smell for some time afterwards. Then he picked up the pipe which was the cause of the mischief, and held it out to his friend. Manton did not take it. He had not stirred, or taken the slightest notice of what was going on close to him.

Algy touched him on the arm. "Have you suddenly gone out of your mind?" he inquired with some irritation; his breath came pumping out at intervals, the unwonted exertion and excitement of putting out the fire had taken out of him all the small reserve of vitality that he possessed.

"Look, Algy," Manton said at length, "Don't

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you see that there is some one in one of the trees in the enclosure opposite the window ? ”

Lysergh turned round and looked with all his might, but could see nothing ; the whites of his eyes were suffused with blood ; he had a singing in his ears ; he was not in the best condition for detective work.

“ No,” he answered, “ I cannot see any one. Besides, what if there is ? As likely as not it is only some boy trying to find out if the chestnuts are ripe. Trust a boy,” he added, “ to get up a tree for something or other.”

Manton did not appear to have heard his friend’s suggestion ; at any rate, he took no notice of it ; he walked quickly across the room, until he got close to the window, which had a white muslin blind over the lower part. Manton looked over this, fixedly, into the trees beyond. After a pause he said : “ I cannot see him now, yet I am perfectly sure I saw a man there, looking towards this direction a moment ago. I must go and see if I cannot find out who it is.” So saying, he ran out of the room before Lysergh could reply. The latter now in his turn walked to the window and looked out, expecting to see the doctor appear in the road below.

The evening was just beginning to close in. Where the trees were thickest the light was uncertain. It was easy to imagine, Lysergh thought, that a swaying leaf was a face or a part of one. Thinking this, he was judging Manton by himself ;

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his own gift of imagination was singularly acute, so much so, that it was not infrequently misleading. The doctor, on the other hand, possessed hardly any imagination at all ; he was just the embodiment of hard, matter-of-fact common sense. Lysergh might have imagined a leaf to be a human face ; it was very improbable that Manton would ever have done so.

After Algy had been watching for a couple of minutes he saw the doctor in the road, having just emerged from the door of his own house. The latter ran quickly to the border of the enclosure, then he climbed over the rails, and, with his face directed upwards, ran in and out between the boles of the trees, evidently intent on seeing if any one was concealed in the topmost branches. After two or three minutes Lysergh could see the doctor no longer ; he had gone farther within, pursuing his investigations.

The barrister stood watching, waiting for his old friend's reappearance. As he did so, he thought sadly of the change the last few days had brought about. He had been generous enough just now in the way he had met Manton's confidence, and the appeal the latter had made to him ; but now that he was alone he had a reaction to the jealousy and regret which had obsessed him before. He felt that he was no longer alone, not even the first, in Manton's thoughts ; they were absorbed by some one else, and that some one the most powerful thing that could come into a man's life—this woman, lying

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only half-conscious in the adjoining house. Lysergh wished fervently she had never crossed his friend's path. He almost wished, yet hated himself for doing so, that she would never get up again from the bed upon which she was lying. Yes, he had come near, if not exactly, to murder in his heart, at any rate, to something akin to it. Algy struggled with his own unworthy feelings, and strove to bring them into subjection to his better nature. His mind was too honourable to harbour such thoughts for long. After all, he confessed that Manton had a right to choose for himself; he ought only to be thankful that he had had exclusive possession for so long. Was it likely that a strong, vigorous, truly virile man like the doctor, would be content always to remain without a companion in his life, or that he would find even the closest man-friendship adequate to his wants?

As regards Lysergh himself, it was different, of course, he admitted. No woman's love was likely to be attracted to his misshapen frame; he did not seek it, he had no desire for it, he declared to himself. Thank God, he was spared that drop in the bitter cup of his lot, at any rate. The awful sense of loneliness, which came to him on realizing that he had lost the first place in Alec Manton's affection, was bad enough. He did not require anything else added to it, to fill to the brim the full cup of his misery, and make it run over.

Lysergh was suddenly conscious of a very curious feeling. He was still standing looking out of the

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window, with his back to the room, waiting for the doctor's reappearance. Then a remarkable sensation came over him. He had heard no sound, at any rate consciously, but he felt that some one had come into the room, that he was no longer alone, as he had been since Manton left the library. The door was slightly to the barrister's right. He now turned sharply round towards it. As he did so he fancied there was a movement. Immediately afterwards he stood transfixed as if spellbound, unable to move or to speak. At first he believed that he was looking upon a beautiful vision. The wakeful nights and trying days which he had recently endured made him doubtful of his own faculties. Gradually, however, he assured himself that what he saw was no figment of the brain. The door was partially open, and, in a light blue dressing-wrap, stood the woman whom Manton had saved in Cursitor Avenue, the invalid of the home-hospital. Her lovely forget-me-not eyes were wide open. She was looking straight in front of her, yet did not appear to be taking anything in. Her glance betrayed no evidence of any consciousness of Lysergh's presence in the apartment. The barrister was struck with her wonderful beauty, so pure, and sweet, and ethereal, with the stamp of illness intensifying the natural characteristics of her face. Lysergh remembered vividly enough all that had passed through his mind so easily ; how he had hated this frail image of a girl a moment ago. Did he hate her now ? He had almost wished her dead. The very

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thought seemed a sacrilege to him now that he saw her before him.

For a full minute or two, perhaps longer, Lysergh stood by the window quite still, like one turned to stone, hardly allowing himself to breathe. The beautiful girl in the doorway did not advance any farther into the room than the extreme edge of the carpet, which was bordered all round by felting. Her feet were clad in dainty little shoes of some soft material. She was still gazing straight in front of her, with eyes that had a startled, almost a frightened look in their blue depths. Yet it was clear that nothing that she could see at that time, with her actual physical sight, was producing the impression she conveyed to the solitary onlooker. He was sure it was not the tangible which lay before her, writing its record there, but some intangible impression upon her wounded brain.

Lysergh did not come to the conclusion that the girl was actually walking in her sleep, as he had done on that never-to-be-forgotten occasion, when Manton had saved him from falling into the pond at Welkin Lodge. She seemed to him rather to be in a trance, neither wholly asleep nor wholly awake, certainly not the latter. The direction in which her eyes were fixed was obviously towards the window. Yet, although Lysergh stood in front of it, a little to one side, he felt sure that she did not see him, that she was unconscious of his propinquity. She gave him the impression, in fact, that she was looking through him at something else, and that that some-

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thing was an object of intense fear. Lysergh had never had such an uncomfortable experience in his life. Sympathy for the girl flooded his whole being, yet he was afraid to help her, afraid to move, lest he should startle her, and so bring about irretrievable mischief. Manton had told him the stress Sir Manvers Hollis had laid on the importance of the patient's not being frightened or distressed in any way.

Under the burden of this feeling Lysergh felt a physical weakness coming over him. He had to stretch out his hand to catch the sill of the window, and so prevent himself from falling. His feeble frame was not capable of undergoing so much emotion.

Suddenly his relief was great. Dr. Manton appeared in the doorway behind the figure of the girl. The sight of his friend gave Lysergh renewed strength. He felt the responsibility of action was removed from his own shoulders, and transferred to those of one who was well fitted to bear it. He looked at Manton to see what he would decide to do. The doctor was standing quietly, and betrayed in his face no signs of surprise at what he saw. The reason for this became clear in a moment. The portly figure and kindly face of the matron of the home-hospital filled in the doorway at the back of the doctor. Mrs. Dundas, it transpired afterwards, had discovered that the girl had left her room, and from the door being left open between the two houses, she had guessed that was the way the fugitive had taken.

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When Mrs. Dundas stood on the upper landing of the doctor's private house she saw Manton himself coming in from the back entrance, having failed in his pursuit of the man whose face he believed he had seen in one of the trees of the enclosure. The matron turned to meet her employer, and said : " The patient has left her room, sir. We partially dressed her this afternoon, and placed her on a couch in the sitting-room under the window. She helped us a little in what we did, and seemed quite like coming to herself ; far more than she has ever done before. The nurse was about the room for some time, and then returned to the bedroom to put things straight. I looked in a couple of minutes ago and found the sitting-room empty. She was not in the bedroom or on the balcony."

For a moment the doctor was too agitated by the news to stop the even flow of the matron's information. Now, however, he exclaimed : " This is most serious news. Where do you think she can be ? "

" I feel sure that she is in this house. I noticed that the door was standing open between the two houses, which, of course, is contrary to the rules."

Manton glanced in the direction of the library, and caught sight of something, which made him take the stairs and the passage as fast as his legs could carry him, the matron following more slowly behind.

After hesitating for a moment, Manton felt it necessary to act. The girl was standing quite still, and did not seem inclined either to move forwards or turn

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back. The doctor went up to her, and touched her with one finger, as lightly as possible, on the right shoulder. She took no notice, but rather seemed turned to stone. Then Manton, after waiting to see if she would rouse herself, laid his whole hand upon her arm, holding it in his own clasp. Then she started, and seemed suddenly to realize that she was in a strange place, which she had never seen before. She was still looking in the direction of the window, and for the first time realized that Lysergh was standing almost in the direct line of her vision. She put up her hands before her face, almost as if to ward off some attack, and then turned swiftly round with her back to the barrister, and found herself face to face with Dr. Manton. She now did a remarkable thing. Instead of turning away, as she had done from Lysergh, she stretched out her arms and cried out : " Oh, where am I ? How did I come here ? I am frightened. Don't let any one take me." Then her head drooped. " I want to rest," she said in a different tone. At this moment she would have fallen, but at a bound Manton saw what was impending, and reached her side. He caught her in his arms, where she lay like one dead. Her face was blanched white ; her eyelids had closed, so that the long lashes rested on her cheek.

" Poor lamb ! " Mrs. Dundas cried. " She has fainted. We must take care she is never left alone again. Fancy her leaving her room and finding her way here. Shall I carry her back, sir ? "

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But Manton was not prepared to surrender the form he held in his arms to any one else. All the long latent love of his nature had quickened into life. It had been stirred and strengthened by the girl holding out her arms to him, and making her pathetic appeal for his help and protection. He gathered up the insensible form of the fainting girl with infinite reverence and tenderness into his arms. Then he carried her out of the room as one might a tired child.

Mrs. Dundas looked on in sympathy and appreciation of the picture, a combination of strength and weakness, the strong man and the clinging, lovely girl. She stood on one side to let them pass.

Manton carried his light burden along the passage and up the staircase, and then passed into the home-hospital. He laid her finally on the sofa in the sitting-room from which she had come. Mrs. Dundas had followed behind rather more slowly. The nurse came in, and under the doctor's directions applied various restoratives, which soon brought back the colour to the patient's cheeks. She looked up and saw Manton's eyes fixed upon her. She breathed a little sigh of content.

"I am tired," she said; "I should like to sleep." And, curling herself round, in a minute or two she was breathing slowly and regularly.

"Thank God," Manton said, "it has ended in this way. Keep her quite quiet, and when she wakes she will be much better. Mind nothing is said about what has happened. It is probable

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when she rouses she will know nothing of what has passed."

In this opinion, however, he was mistaken.

Although the doctor had returned from his hurried search in the enclosure without discovering anything, he none the less firmly believed that he was not labouring under a delusion in the matter. He was perfectly assured, that some one had been watching the upper windows of the house from the vantage-ground of a forked branch opposite to them. Probably this man had seen him turn towards the window and had at once descended from the tree and made off. He had had plenty of time to do so before Manton, quick as he was, could arrive on the scene. Some children had been playing on the green sward in the midst of the plantation, from which several paths diverged. The doctor, who was a favourite with all children, had questioned them closely as to whether they had seen any one pass, but children, unless they are specially interested, make indifferent witnesses. Most of them declared they had seen no one. One or two thought that they had, but, as they could give no description, and could not even say in which direction this highly problematical man had gone, Manton could not rely upon their evidence. He felt sure in his own mind that this apparition of the daytime was connected in some way with the plot against his patient, and it made him determine to redouble his vigilance. Mrs. Dundas was told to warn the nurse that some one must always be left in charge, either in the sitting-

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room or bedroom, day and night, until the doctor himself gave permission to relax these directions.

Mrs. Dundas had been sufficiently alarmed herself, from quite a different cause, to make her at one with her employer in this matter.

After his friend had left the room with his burden, Mrs. Dundas following, Lysergh sat down heavily on a chair, which was drawn up to the central table, and buried his face in his hands. He hardly knew what he felt, still less what he thought. Everything seemed in a maze. The soothing draught which the doctor had given him was beginning to have its effect upon his brain, to dull its perceptions, prior to bringing on sleep. All that had happened in that room appeared unreal to him. It was so contrary to anything he had ever passed through before. He could almost have fancied that he had dreamt it all, but for a strange ache he felt about his heart. He had begun by hating this siren who had captured the heart of his friend. Then he had seen her, not, it is true, for the first time, that had been in the glare of Serjeant Skinner's bull's-eye lantern; but this second time, in the daylight; she had conquered him, had won her way to his heart, as she had before to Manton's, by the unutterable charm of her beauty. He did not grudge her to his friend. He would not, if he could, win her from him. He no longer wanted to separate these two; but was rather content to bring them together. Manton was worthy of the lovely girl, as she of him—physically worthy! while he was a hopeless cripple, his brain

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enshrined in a body unworthy of the jewel of which it was the casket. He knew to-day what love might be—to others ; for himself there could be no woman's love. Fate had shut him out from it by making him a distorted wreck on life's highway, a cripple. He hid his face in his hands. Tears came—hot, scalding tears—and, gliding between his clenched fingers, dropped upon the table.

When man cries there seems a cloud across the sky, and the very heavens appear to weep in unison. At this moment it was veritably true, for the sunshine had faded. Instead, the rain began to fall. Lysergh must have sat there nearly half an hour before any interruption came. His spirit had had leisure to quieten down. At the expiration of that time Alec Manton came into the room. He came straight to his friend's side, and laid his hand on his shoulder. Lysergh looked up at him to read his face.

“ It was strange,” the doctor said, “ that she should have left her room, that she should have come here.” He paused, and then went on. “ It was some minutes before she came to herself after I took her back. I believe by to-morrow she will be quite herself. I tried to find out from her, without direct questioning, what made her do what she did ; but she only got bewildered, and pressed her hand over her brow. Do you know, Algy, what I think it was ? As her faculties get clearer, her fears of some one or something, I cannot exactly say which, come back to her. I believe her brain was working

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sub-consciously without her knowing it. I feel sure she was trying to get away from some one whom she felt to be near her."

"Perhaps she has taken a dislike to the nurse or to your housekeeper, Alec. Is not that sort of unthinking repugnance a very frequent phase of some kinds of illness, especially those of the brain?"

"Yes, that is quite true. I thought of it, and, without directly questioning the poor girl, I had each of the attendants, including even the housemaid who dusts and attends to her rooms, in and made them come close to her, but she did not betray the slightest interest, certainly not anything approaching to dislike. On the contrary, she was evidently grateful to each of them for the little attentions I arranged that she should receive; and for Mrs. Dundas and the nurse, both of whom have displayed affection for her, she seemed to feel quite a reciprocation of feeling." Manton's face showed he was puzzled.

"Perhaps it was neither repugnance nor fear," Lysergh suggested, almost *sotto voce*, "but quite another thing which drew her here. She was the victim of some overmastering impulse which conquered her in her weak mental condition, any one could see that, and which made her leave her couch to come." Lysergh had turned very white, and he was evidently speaking with some difficulty. Manton had taken a step or two back.

"I do not understand you," he said, yet some-

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thing in his tones belied the words which came from his half-closed lips.

" May she not have come to look for some one—to look for some one who had come to be very much to her in the trance of her weakness ? " Lysergh rose and looked full into Manton's face. " This is your room, Alec. Of both these houses it is the one most connected with your personality. *I believe she had come to look for you.*" Lysergh's face was working with the emotion which mastered him. What would he not give to be able to attract a love like that !

Manton felt himself flush. " You are talking nonsense, Algy ! and you must know it. How could she tell that the house next to the hospital was mine ? How could she divine that this was my favourite sanctum ? "

" Don't you believe in telepathy ? In the extraordinary power of attraction which one personality has over another ? I know you do. If two beings who love one another can communicate their feelings, and even what is happening to them, at immense distances apart, as well-authenticated instances show that they can, is it not easy to conceive that this girl, when she wanted you, knew where to look for you, Alec ? "

Manton's brow darkened.

" You are almost bringing a charge against her—of—of forwardness," he protested.

" Not at all. Need I say to you, a doctor and a student, that outward circumstances which are

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parts of our elaborate and wholly artificial system of life—quite necessary, I grant you, but still absolutely artificial—have a way of disappearing when the brain is warped and clouded? Then the man or woman goes back to primitive impulses; civilization and its bonds are shaken off without effort, because without knowledge of their existence. Love turns to love, life to the kindred life, spirit to its twin spirit, without thought of the body and its circumstances, to which at other times we all attach so much import. There is nothing forward in it, for the conditions are totally changed.”

Manton did not answer. He was in deep reflection, thinking out the suggestions his friend had thrown out. At last he looked at Lysergh again.

“I could almost wish to think what you have been offering to me as a solution; but my reason, and my knowledge of the case, alike forbid. I believe she may have tried to find me in her mental distress and bewilderment; but, if she did, it was in the capacity of protector, in the rôle I assumed when I first came into her life, and of which she may have had some consciousness under the stupor which held her—as you know, some people under the influence of an anæsthetic like chloroform have declared later that they had dim perceptions of what was going on. I believe that if she sought me, as you suggest, she did so because she was afraid, because she was left alone and unprotected.”

“Of what was she likely to be afraid?” Lysergh asked.

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" I believe she knew, whether she actually saw him or not, that the man was in her vicinity, whose face I am sure I saw reflected in the glass of this room. She was flying from him ; possibly she was flying to me."

" But you failed to find any one out there in the shrubbery ? " Lysergh interjected.

" Yes, I failed to find him ; but I know he was there all the same. I found two branches he had snapped off in climbing, and the marks of his boots were in the loam at the foot of the tree."

" If I were you I should place the matter in the hands of the police."

" I have sent for Serjeant Skinner," Manton replied quietly. At this moment there was a loud knock and ring at the bell. These signs denoted a visitor, not a patient. Those who came to consult the doctor professionally were directed to ' ring only ' by a brass inscription on the door-plate.

Immediately afterwards the door was opened, and a man-servant announced : " Serjeant Skinner to see you, sir."

VIII

WHAT HAPPENED AT NO. 24

SERGEANT SKINNER looked a fine type of an intelligent, strong-limbed, British policeman of the best sort, as he saluted Dr. Manton. Having done so, he cast a dubious glance at the Hon. Algernon Lysergh, who had risen to his feet as if prepared to leave the room. The doctor interpreted the officer's glance at once.

"This is my friend, Mr. Lysergh, Lord Caston's second son. He was in my motor on the night that I first made your acquaintance, and we became associated in the unravelling of this extraordinary affair. He is informed with reference to all the circumstances, and you can speak freely before him, Sergeant."

The officer bowed deferentially to Lysergh, and the latter resumed his seat, prepared to take his part in the interview.

"You have come wonderfully quickly after my summons, Serjeant," Dr. Manton said, after the officer had taken a chair he had indicated with a gesture.

Skinner looked surprised.

"Summons, sir! There must be some mistake. No message of any kind has reached me; I have not been to the office since two o'clock. I came on

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straight here from Cursitor Avenue, where I have been investigating the rather remarkable circumstance which has happened there. I came to tell you all about it. I understand, Doctor, that you have not seen your patient, Conybeare, to-day? It was put in the form of a question, but was really a statement of fact, which the serjeant had down in his voluminous notebook.

“No, I called there yesterday. He is doing very well, and if he can be kept from the use of stimulants for a while, will certainly recover from his present illness. I told Walters I should not come again for a day or two.”

“This morning, just before noon, Walters left her patient to the care of the man-servant while she herself went out to do some shopping. Conybeare was in a drowsy state, between sleeping and waking, when the nurse left him. According to the statement of the man-servant, Myers, a most unsatisfactory and stupid witness, owing to his continual condition of inebriation, the nurse had been gone about a quarter of an hour when a stranger let himself in at the front door, and came up the stairs to the bedroom in which Conybeare was lying. Myers heard him coming up the stairs. He knew, he says, it was a strange step, because he noticed there was a halt in it, especially as the new-comer crossed the landing which”—here Skinner turned to Lysergh—“like the stairs, has no carpet on it, number seventeen being only partially furnished. Myers went to the door just as the other man

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turned the handle and came into the room. The blind was three-parts down, because Conybeare seemed inclined to sleep, so that the light was anything but good, and, as I say, Myers is about the least observant person possible." Skinner said this with some irritation; nothing annoys an intelligent detective more than an important witness, who has not got his wits about him at a critical moment. "He is confident that the man 'was quite the gentleman,' rather handsome than not; but as his good looks, according to Myers, consisted in piercing black eyes, and moustache, and short beard to match, all of the latter probably being put on for the occasion——"

Manton half rose from the seat as if about to speak. He was evidently greatly excited; but, mastering himself with an effort, the doctor sat down again, and motioned to Skinner to go on with his statement.

"The stranger made some lame apology for going up into Conybeare's room unannounced," the sergeant went on, "said that he had rung the door-bell, and that no one had answered it—which was possibly true, by the by, as it sounds in the back kitchen, and, as you know, Doctor, Conybeare's cook-housekeeper is nearly stone-deaf."

Manton nodded. "No doubt," he said, "the man knew this when he invented the excuse."

"Just what I think," Skinner agreed. "This strange gentleman then said that he had come to look for the nurse he knew was in attendance there."

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A friend of his had met with an accident in the road, and he wanted the address of the doctor who was attending the sick gentleman. He apologized profusely for the unusual step he had been obliged to take, which only the emergency rendered excusable." Skinner half turned to Lysergh. "I am piecing it together, and putting it into my own words. It is substantially Myers' account, with some slight assistance from Mr. Conybeare, as the latter roused himself sufficiently to take in a little of what was going on."

"I understand," Lysergh answered, as the officer had appealed to him. "I am a barrister by profession, although I do not practise to any extent. I can, however, quite realize what very unsatisfactory evidence you would get from two men in such a condition as they are."

"Exactly, sir. Well, Myers explained that Nurse Walters was out, and apparently he did not know your address, Doctor Manton, neither, of course, did Conybeare, to whom the stranger appealed. The gentleman handed Myers half a crown, and then proceeded to ransack the mantelpiece and the writing-table in the window, to find what he wanted. Myers says that he seemed to get it pretty quickly, and he then left the room with a curt nod, without a word of good-bye. Nurse Walters remembers that there was a prescription of yours among some bills and letters on Conybeare's writing-table, the only good piece of furniture in the bedroom."

"That would have my name and address on it,"

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Manton said, "as I mark all the prescriptions with my private stamp."

"So I understand," Skinner answered.

"I don't quite see the object of all this," Manton put in. "What does the fellow want my name and address for? Besides, it is in all the directories of the district; but, of course, that would not help him, unless he turned out all the doctors of the neighbourhood, and that would be a large order, for their names are legion, especially in South London."

"He has practically done that already," Skinner said quietly. "I have made careful inquiries, and I can trace at least six visits to different surgeries to ascertain, under some pretext or other, whether the particular doctor attended a patient in Cursitor Avenue on the night in question. I have ascertained another fact," he added, "these inquiries have not all been made by the same person, in fact, in none of them was there any impression left behind on servant, dispenser, or medical man, whichever answered the queries, of the visitor being slightly lame. It is a sort of physical defect which was almost sure to be noticed, especially by a doctor or his people."

"That only establishes the fact we have known all along," Manton remarked, "that there are at least three men engaged in this business, whatever it is. The lame man keeps out of the way as much as possible, because he suspects that you have something like a description of him. The others are

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safe, because they did not show themselves in any way in the first instance."

"I did not come to tell you this fact only, Doctor Manton," the detective went on, "although it is of great importance. I have now to add two others equally interesting. You remember that I arranged from the first that a policeman should live at number twenty-four Cursitor Avenue, the house in which the furniture had been left, and, although the latter was removed by the firm who supplied it, I continued the arrangement, hoping that some clue might come to me in that direction. Downie, who was with me that night, and another man named Modder, have taken it in turns to be on duty there night and day ; we first put into the house the absolute necessities for a man by himself. They were under orders to keep as close a watch as possible upon the street, but, at the same time, not to show themselves more than they could help. All the things we had in the house were removed there after midnight, and the change between the two men, when one went on duty and the other off, took place at the same hour. In addition to the constable at number twenty-four, I always had another man on point duty at the entrance to the avenue, so as to have surveillance on both sides of number seventeen. This was made more complete by the fact that the road curves a little towards the end of where the dead wall is, so that a man standing in the window of twenty-four could see any one calling or leaving number seventeen, and we had a record kept of all who came

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to the door, tradesmen calling for orders, boys bringing parcels, postmen, and the people living in the house."

"You certainly have done the thing pretty completely, Serjeant," Lysergh remarked with admiration.

"Yes," said Manton, "nothing has been left unthought of on your part. Then, of course, the lame man must have been noted."

"By the by," put in the barrister, "if you have an officer at both ends, how did he get in without being arrested, as each constable is furnished with a description of him? Could he have slipped past the policeman on duty at the end of the avenue, or is there a way through some other house with access at the back, as we all know number twenty-four has?"

"Neither, sir. I have been myself into every unoccupied house in the road. Number twenty-four is the only one which can be got at from the rear. All the rest are blinded by another street—Filey Avenue—which runs at the end of the small gardens parallel to Cursitor Avenue. The only break in the houses is caused by the lane, which terminates at the back door of number twenty-four. It seems that when the houses were built in Filey Avenue there was some doubtful title with reference to the ownership of this lane, so that it was left as it was, when houses were erected on either side of it."

"Really, Serjeant," Manton interrupted, "you are

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piling Pelion on Ossa, mystery on mystery. How on earth could this lame man get in and get out without being caught, if your net was as complete as you make it out to have been? He seems, according to your own account, to be not only a bit lame, but to have the cloven hoof itself. No one but his Satanic Majesty himself could accomplish such things."

"I am coming to what I have to tell you, and it is a matter which will make head-quarters take the whole affair up uncommonly seriously, I can assure you. When Nurse Walters went back to Conybeare, she at once heard from Myers the story of their strange visitor. Myers was all eagerness to get out to spend the two-and-sixpence he had had given him, and would barely wait to give any details of what had happened. Walters, however, gleaned enough to be sure the matter was of the first importance, and she very properly had a telephone message conveyed to me. I was sent for, and went to Cursitor Avenue directly. I questioned the constable on point duty. He declared he had seen every one who passed along the street, and had also kept careful record of the few who had gone up the avenue and come out of it. He was quite positive no one answering to anything like the description of the lame man had been anywhere near the place. As the constable was one I could trust, and of more than usual powers of observation—we know all our officers thoroughly—I felt sure the explanation was to be found at number twenty-four. I went up there

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at once. Downie was on duty at the time. I did not see him at the window. The house was very quiet, I felt sure there was something wrong."

"Go on, Serjeant," Manton cried, as the officer paused in his narration. The doctor had risen to his feet in his interest, and had advanced a couple of paces towards the officer.

"I opened the door, and went straight to the front room, where the constable had orders to be as much as possible. At first I thought there was no one in it. Then I saw the man's boots. He was lying at full length between the window and a rough deal table we had had placed there for his meals. Downie was quite unconscious, and had not come to when I left the infirmary to which I had him conveyed. There is a great bump at the back of his head. No doubt he was felled from behind while at his post of observation."

"I am dreadfully sorry," Manton exclaimed. "This man with the lame leg seems to be the worst kind of miscreant, and he certainly sticks at nothing. Does the surgeon think that Downie is seriously injured?"

"No. He thinks it is slight concussion of the brain, but that the effects will pass off."

There was silence for a minute or two while the two hearers were mentally digesting the serjeant's story. After that time Manton remarked: "It seems a dastardly and dangerous thing to do, to fell this man, and for so small a result—just to find

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out who I was and where I lived—I cannot see my way through it at all.”

“Don’t you see, Manton,” put in Lysergh, “it is not you they wanted at all ; it is the girl they know you carried off that night. They only want to find you in order that they may find her through you.”

“Great Scott !” cried Manton, “that accounts for the face I saw in the glass,” and without another word he darted out of the room, to the amazement both of the serjeant and of Lysergh.

“What is the affair Doctor Manton referred to just now ?” the detective inquired, when he had recovered from his surprise at the medical man’s hurried exodus.

“My friend was very much disturbed this afternoon. He fancied he saw in that glass”—Lysergh nodded towards the mirror over the mantelpiece—“the reflection of the face of some one in the trees opposite. He rushed out very much as he has done now, and made a search, but without finding any one. Doctor Manton is a man, as a rule, of iron nerves ; but he has had several sleepless nights, he tells me, and I think all this affair has affected him more than anything which has happened to him in his life before—and, after all, even the strongest of us find out sometimes that there is a difference between flesh and blood and mere machinery.”

The serjeant went to the window without answering a word, threw it up, looked at the enclosure opposite the house for a minute or two with great care, then he gave a low whistle. Lysergh sat

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watching the officer's movements with the deepest interest. In less than a minute there was the sound of footsteps in the road outside. Lysergh could see the head and shoulders of a man dressed in plain clothes, but whose appearance, and the way he was standing, evidenced the fact that he had been drilled, and was now "at attention." The serjeant bent down and gave the new-comer some directions, but his tones were so low that they did not reach the barrister's ears.

Skinner shut down the window, stood looking out for a minute or two, then turned back to Lysergh.

"I fully believe your friend did see some one when he thought he did this afternoon, and that it was not an invention of his own nerves. I have three men in plain clothes stationed at different points in Alvers Street; I have directed them to make a thorough search of the enclosure, and not to miss even the tops of the trees. I do not, however, anticipate any results; I merely ordered it as a matter of routine, so that no stone be left unturned. The man we have to deal with is as crafty as he is unscrupulous, and will not be easily caught."

"You are certainly right there," Lysergh agreed. "I should like to have a hand in the capture when it does come off, although I am afraid that in a stand-up fight I should be more a hindrance than a help." At this moment the doctor returned to the room.

"Thank God!" he said, "she is all right. Do you know, a terrible thought came across me that

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they might have spirited her away already, when the serjeant finished telling us what had happened, and you, Algy, showed me the real object of what the lame man and his confederates were doing. When you said, 'They only want to find you in order that they may find her,' and when I thought of the face I can swear I saw in that mirror, an ice-cold shiver went down my back ; I felt like a man with a million of gold in his safe, and a burglar breaking into the house. I ran straight to her room. She was lying quietly enough, and the nurse was reading to her. It seemed impossible to believe that any one in the world could have designs against her. She looked as pure and sweet as any angel."

The serjeant looked at the doctor curiously.

IX

INQUIRING AFTER THE MISSING

SERJEANT SKINNER had left the room, in accordance with a summons he had received through Dr. Manton's footman. He guessed that he was wanted, to receive a report from the men he had instructed to search the enclosure thoroughly. They had found ample evidence of some one having been up one of the trees facing the doctor's windows, just as Manton himself had done, and, of course, they had seen a good many footprints, the doctor alone having contributed a good share, as he had paced the wooded ring from end to end.

Otherwise they were not rewarded. Skinner enjoined upon them renewed vigilance, and sent them back to their posts. On Skinner's return to the smoking-room Lysergh asked him: "You told us there were two things you had to report. So far you have given us only one of them; or did you mean that the search for my friend's name and address, and the discovery of Downie lying insensible on the floor, were the two things?"

"No; there is another which also has an air of mystery about it. We were informed at our office to-day from Scotland Yard, that inquiries were being made about a missing young lady, answering to the

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description we had supplied to head-quarters of Doctor Manton's patient. I was ordered to interview the inquirer at an address she gave, which proved to be a private hotel in Bolsover Street, near Victoria Station. It was while I was away there that all this happened in Cursitor Avenue. I had just returned to the office when Nurse Walters' message reached me over the telephone, and I went straight to the avenue."

Manton had not been attending very particularly when Lysergh commenced to question Skinner ; but at the mention of inquiries for his patient his face grew sharp and anxious. He got up and paced the room. "What if some one were to come in now with a right to take this girl out of his hands ? He had no claim upon her, nor the slightest hold over her. Her friends could take her away at once without even a protest on his part. After all, to them, and worst of all, to her, he, Manton, was only a medical man called in accidentally to prescribe in this case, one of many thousands which had passed through his hands in his professional capacity. A handsome fee ! That was all the situation demanded, from the world's point of view. A fee ! to still the aching of his heart, to compensate for a loss which nothing in the world could ever replace. Alec Manton never realized until now the absolute obsession of his own heart, the depths of the love which had filled him to the exclusion of everything else in the world. This girl was all the world to him, and he was less than nothing to her. She could

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hardly be said to realize his existence. That was the sting of it all. He had been falling desperately, hopelessly in love with the beautiful casket, and with the soul he could read that the casket contained, while she had been unconscious of the outside world, unconscious of him!

Manton turned a white face on the detective, who had been watching him, and had realized his feelings more than the doctor had the slightest idea.

"Who was this person who inquired after my charge?" he asked.

"A white-haired old lady, who said she was a distant connection of the subject of inquiry, and acted as her chaperon. She gave her own name as Mrs. Aitchison, but declined to furnish that of her ward without the latter's permission. Mrs. Aitchison, according to the account she gave me, had been called from home owing to the serious illness of her only sister, and had been detained. When she returned—I gathered that it was to some place in Yorkshire—she was astounded to find that the young lady had left very hurriedly for London. Mrs. Aitchison was terribly disturbed at receiving no answer either to letter or telegram, so she followed her ward. The latter sometimes stayed at this particular private hotel, but not always. The proprietress said that she had not been there on this occasion. Mrs. Aitchison felt that the only thing left was to communicate with the police, which she had done immediately."

"Do you say that this lady objected to giving the

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name of the young lady she was inquiring for ? ” Lysergh inquired.

“ Yes ; she said that there were family reasons which rendered it necessary there should be the least possible publicity in the matter, and she did not feel justified in disclosing her ward’s identity without the latter’s consent.”

“ Then I suppose,” put in Manton, in a constrained voice, “ that I may expect a visit from Mrs. Aitchison at any time ? ”

“ No ; not at present. I did not furnish your name and address until I received fresh instructions from yourself, Doctor. I only assured her that the young lady could not be better cared for than she was at present, that she had met with a serious accident which required close medical supervision and great care to avoid any excitement——”

“ That is quite true, quite true, Serjeant,” Manton broke in, passing his hand across his brow. That was his one stand-by, the condition of this girl requiring extreme quietude. Surely before she was able to be removed he might be able to awaken in her heart something which answered to the tumultuous throbbings of his own ? Skinner went on without appearing to notice the interruption.

“ I told her that I was in continual touch with the medical man who had received the patient into his own private hospital, that he was of the highest standing and respectability, and that she would have to be content until I had seen you. All the same, Mrs. Aitchison must, I think, be informed by

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to-morrow, at latest, under whose charge her ward has been placed."

Manton was pacing up and down the room with long, rapid strides. "Yes, I suppose so," he admitted, "but please to warn Mrs. Aitchison that she can on no account be admitted into the hospital itself, until I regard her visit as absolutely safe. If any excitement were to set up fresh mischief in the brain, already injured by the fall and the shock generally, I would not answer for the consequences." Manton tried to speak in his natural voice, but could not prevent his emotion showing itself in his tones.

"That is, of course, understood," Skinner replied quietly, "but I will make it a stipulation with this lady before I give her your name and address, Doctor Manton. Then, shall I say that she can see you to-morrow?"

Manton considered a minute. "I think two o'clock to-morrow afternoon would be the most convenient time." His partner being now at home, it would not be difficult for him to devote part of his morning to attendance on his patient. Her recent rate of progress made him anticipate that she would be well enough to speak rationally to him, and he hoped to gain some information from her before he saw the chaperon. Manton had a great longing to know the girl's identity and name. It seemed to place him so far away from her not to have the slightest idea who she was.

Lysergh had been working out the problem presented to them by the mysterious fog in which they

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were all moving on quite different lines. It was his turn now to question the detective. "Did you gather anything from Mrs. Aitchison as to the motives of the extraordinary attack made on this young lady? Had she any great sum of money, or valuables in the shape of jewellery, upon her, that Mrs. Aitchison knew of?"

"I asked that question, and Mrs. Aitchison replied at once, without any reserve, 'You may take it from me that the police are not at all likely to find out the motives which produced this outrage on my ward. This I will say, that it had nothing to do with anything my ward may have carried about with her. In fact, I am quite sure she had nothing on which would tempt even a common footpad. She had far too much common sense to go to a lonely part of London wearing, or carrying in her pocket, anything to tempt the cupidity of an ordinary thief.'"

"'Then you know,' I said, 'what did take her that night to such an out-of-the-way spot as Cursitor Avenue.' Mrs. Aitchison pursed her lips and finally replied: 'I know, and I do not know; I can only surmise; but I am sure my guess is very close to the truth. More than this nothing would induce me to tell you.' I was rather nettled, gentlemen, at this answer, which seemed to me to close the best avenue we have for finding out all we want to know. I said to her: 'We have a description of the man who made this murderous attack on your ward. He is a dark man, lame of one foot.' When I stated this to her I thought the old lady was about to faint. She had

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to have recourse to her smelling-salts, and sat staring at me with her head lying heavily back on her chair. After a pause she gasped out : ‘ How do the police know this ? ’ I replied that the doctor had seen the man for a minute just as he made the attack ; I pressed her to help us to find him, to give me, at any rate, his name, but I could not get another word out of her.”

“ Is it not possible that Mrs. Aitchison may not be above-board herself ? ” Lysergh asked. “ May she not be implicated in this affair ? If I had her in the witness-box, although our side had called her, I should ask the judge to allow me to treat her as hostile.”

“ I do not think you would have said so if you had actually seen her, sir,” Skinner answered. “ She was in genuine distress, when I first went in, about her ward’s condition, and I could see that she shuddered at the reference I made to the lame man for whom we are searching ; but some overmastering feeling kept her tongue tied, and I gathered that it was for the sake of the injured party, not for her own. No, sir, if you had seen her you would have come to the same conclusion as I did, that Mrs. Aitchison was under a binding moral obligation not to disclose what she knew. Her sympathies are all with us ; but the secret is not hers to give away.”

Immediately after this the serjeant rose to go away. “ I will communicate with Mrs. Aitchison either to-night or first thing to-morrow morning, and you may expect her here, Doctor Manton, with-

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out fail, at two o'clock to-morrow afternoon. You may rely that this house will be carefully watched at all points until further notice. I hope to find that Downie has recovered consciousness by the time I return, and possibly may be able to throw some light on the attack made upon him at number twenty-four."

"If I can be of any help to the poor man, or the police surgeon would like me to see him, you will let me know," Manton said.

"Thank you, sir. I will be sure to do so, but our surgeon, Mr. MacAlister, thought it was quite a simple case."

Lysergh left soon after the detective. He saw that Manton wanted to be alone. As the barrister pressed his friend's hand he said: "You may rely on me in every way to help you. Don't think I am going to be selfish any more."

"I know," Manton replied, "you are the best friend man ever had, Algy."

X

A MORNING VISIT

MRS. DUNDAS threw open the door with an air of proud satisfaction, which would have amused Dr. Manton at any other time. Now he was so much in earnest about the object of his visit, and consequently so nervous with regard to it, that all other considerations sank into insignificance. The doctor had received a report that, except for a little weakness, his patient was quite convalescent. Her mental balance was restored, partly by her own physical power of recuperation, partly by her inherent youthfulness—a wonderful ally against many forms of disease—partly by the restorative remedies Manton had called to her aid from the resource his knowledge had at his disposal.

For the first time Manton was about to be received in the sitting-room of the suite, which had been placed at her disposal in the home-hospital, when she was brought to its door. Hitherto he had seen her in the bedroom. It seemed to indicate her advance towards convalescence more than anything else, and at the same time Manton felt that he was more the visitor and less the doctor—*more the man*. Did Mrs. Dundas feel it too, as she ushered him in with an obvious air of performing a pleasant task?

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The nurse was flitting about the room when Manton entered. The fact helped him, although he did not intend that she should remain. On a sofa-settee in front of the window the patient half sat, half reclined. She was dressed in a lace *négligé* which Mrs. Dundas, with more taste than any one would have given her credit for, had procured. It suited the peach-like skin to perfection, and set off the rare shaping of her head and neck. Manton had a difficulty in mastering himself, to treat the visit in the first instance as one from medical man to patient. She was so consummately lovely, and she blushed so consciously when he came and shook hands with her, making some trivial remark of congratulation that she was so much better, that his power of determination had to be exercised to the full, not to betray something of his feelings. How lovely she was ! How he loved her ! These were the things which drummed in all the pulses of his being while he asked the ordinary, sometimes important, now trivial, questions about her appetite, her sleep, and all the small things which a doctor inquires after, while he feels a pulse or listens to the story a lung or the heart has to tell him. Did she know it ? Did she realize anything of what she had become to him ? Love is an all-powerful factor at all times ; but when it comes, somewhat later than usual in life, to a strong nature hitherto free from its attacks, it has the force of a tropical tornado. Manton had regarded himself as practically immune. He was learning the lesson of his own

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powerlessness in the face of a once-despised enemy, during those days that his patient lay unconscious under his care. Now that intelligence showed itself in the veiled eyes, that the woman in her was awake, Manton responded to the glow from within until the blaze threatened to become a veritable conflagration.

“ I love you ! I love you ! I love you ! ” was what he longed to say, to throw himself at her feet ; to kiss her hands—instead, he was the doctor, asking these trivial questions that crossed his lips a hundred times a day !

Alec gave his directions to the nurse, and, as soon as he had finished, she made an excuse and stepped out of the room. He drew up a low cane-bottomed chair and sat down. The patient was between him and the open window. Her profile was towards him. Half resting on the cushions of the settee, her luxuriant hair was tumbled in beautiful disorder. Rain had fallen during the night, but the sun was shining again now, sparkling in a thousand drops on the leaves of the trees in the enclosure. There was a warmth in the air, and the buzzing of myriads of bees and other insects. Manton did not feel inclined to begin the conversation. In truth, he did not know what to say ; for the words his heart and his brain longed to utter his tongue was tied not to express. Yet, as often happens in such cases, he could think of nothing else. His intellectual outfit seemed paralysed, or, at any rate, out of gear. It was, consequently, the girl who first broke the silence after the nurse had left the room.

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"I am afraid," she said, "I was dreadfully stupid yesterday afternoon. It all seemed to come to me early this morning, while I lay in bed watching the reflection of the first rays of the sunlight steal, like golden fingers, between the lattices of the blinds into the room across the wall-paper and ceiling."

How sweet and musical her voice was!

"My brain cleared as if by magic, and with the clearing came more than half-knowledge of what had happened to me, of what I had done. I do not wish to speak of that terrible night."

She covered her face with her hands for a minute or two, but later went on:

"I do not know how I came here. Mrs. Dundas, of course, has told me that I am in the best of quarters under your care, Doctor Manton, in the home-hospital which adjoins your own house—I can recollect a dimness not of sight so much, as of what is at the back of sight. I remember that I could not think. I lived in some dull dream, not vivid at all, like a thing seen through a semi-opaque precious stone like an opal. I ate and drank what was brought to me by Mrs. Dundas or the maid. I felt that you came to me from time to time, but it was, as it were, to some one else, I looking on, only half-interested—hardly, in fact, interested at all. How long this sort of torpor, this feeling of lethargy and stupor lasted I could not have told. It might have been weeks or months. Mrs. Dundas says I have not been here quite ten days. It seems more like a year."

A Morning Visit

“Are you, then, so anxious to go—to leave us, and get back into the world?” Manton asked with feverish eagerness.

She cast at him a quick glance of surprise, as if to read his very thoughts—which he could not interpret at the time. Apparently satisfied with her reading of his face, the girl reverted once more to her former position, looking not at him, but straight before her. She wished to recall her own feelings and sensations, and she found it easier to do so when her eyes were fixed on the wall, rather than on his face, or even out of the window.

“No; I do not mean that. In some respects I would rather stay here—but then——” She broke off. “Let me finish what I was saying about yesterday. It was after lunch, how long I do not know. I do not even know whether I was awake or asleep; I think I was between the two. I felt that some one was looking at me”—she stopped, and put up her hands with an impressive gesture, as if warning off some dreaded object, then she went on more quickly—“some one I fear, Doctor Manton”—she shuddered—“it was just as if he were looking at me, threatening me from among the tops of those trees out there, opposite my bedroom window; no, it was not quite opposite,” she was evidently making an effort to recall her experiences exactly, “but from a corner. His eyes seemed to scorch me; I was lying just as I am now, right in the window, on this same couch which nurse had placed here for me. There was no one in the room at the time; I felt I must get

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away from him instantly, or he would come and take me by force. Can you understand this, Doctor? Of course, it was all my stupid illness and imagination, I know that now; but it was terribly real and true to me then."

Alec did not reply. He knew that this girl had seen what he had seen, the face in the tree-top; but he did not want to tell her so. It were better that she should think it all a figment of her imagination.

"Well, I hardly know what happened next. I believe I must have got up and thrown something round me; then I went downstairs and through some doors, but I was dreaming all the time—nothing seemed real—until"—she stopped and blushed vividly—"I felt myself being put back on the sofa again by some strong arms that seemed to rest me—I did not know until to-day, Doctor, that you yourself—brought—me—back." She said each of these last words with a sort of gulp between them.

"Yes," he said, "I brought you back in my arms, as I brought you here, first. Do you think I can ever forget it?" Alec spoke very low, especially the last query, yet it reached the girl. She turned right away, and looked out into the enclosure, so that he could only see her shell-like ears peeping out of the luxuriance of her hair.

Manton took her long, slim fingers, rendered transparent by her illness, into his hand; but she gently, and yet firmly released herself from his touch. Her action reminded Alec of the fact that, although he had had more than a week, which practically meant

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a lifetime, to grow accustomed to the thought of her, to this girl he was only some one who had come into focus to-day, out of the mists of yesterday, and of the days that had gone before it. Manton felt he was a comparative stranger to the one being he loved best in the world. It was a veritable irony of fortune. She had never seen him clearly until this morning, and he did not even know her name ! Yet he loved her, and would love her, he knew, as long as life lasted. There was a constrained pause for quite an appreciable time before she spoke again.

Then she turned her beautiful eyes full upon him, none the less beautiful to him, and infinitely more appealing, from the fact that he saw in their depths the mist of unshed tears.

"Do not think me ungrateful, Doctor Manton. Indeed, I am not that. I know I owe to you just everything—my life, perhaps, certainly my safety here." She shuddered as some thought passed across her mind.

"I trust you do not feel yourself under an obligation," he said, with a chill about his heart. "I do not want you to feel that, not for the world. I only want you to feel that I would stand by you and protect you against all the world. You do believe that, don't you ?"

He would have liked to have added some endearing word, but he was tongue-tied. He knew he must not utter it. She put up her hand as if to ward something off.

"You have done enough," she said. "Fate has

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dealt with me with two hands. In one hand it has brought me—well, I suppose all that a girl might long for—birth, wealth, position, and—and—other things.” She blushed. It would be idle, and contrary to the natural frankness of her character, for her to doubt what every mirror must have told her, from the day she first saw herself reflected in the glass, until now, that she was of a rare and perfect beauty. The girl went on more hurriedly : “ With the other hand fate has given me a terrible warp in my web of destiny ; it has girded me with an iron chain, which binds me closer every day, and from which I fear I shall never escape, never be able to free myself.”

“ Cannot I free you ? ” he asked, and very gently once more Manton took her hand and pressed it softly.

She returned the mute caress just a very little this time, and then slipped her fingers out of his grasp.

“ You cannot,” she said, “ you cannot. Sometimes I think only death can set me free.”

XI

FOREBODINGS OF THE FUTURE

DR. MANTON was moved beyond description at the unutterable sadness which showed itself in the tones, and, indeed, in the words of his patient's last sentence, "Sometimes I think that only death can set me free." He did not know what to say, how to reply to it. To gather her up in his arms, to shield her life there, that was his natural impulse, the one obvious response of the strong man, when the woman he loved put into words the pessimism which lay at the root of her life.

But such a course was impossible to him—yet. The dignity of her maidenly reserve forbade it. The shortness of their acquaintance stood in the way. Yet any other answer seemed so utterly commonplace and inadequate, Alec hated to make it. At last he said: "One day you will learn to know me better, of that I am assured. When that time comes——"

She interrupted with a quick gesture. "Do not let us talk of it. I would not drag you—any one—into the maelstrom of my unfortunate fate for all the world." He would have protested, but she silenced him with a dignity she could assume at will. "I have been talking much too freely," she remarked, after a dead pause, in which the buzz of the insects

Dr. Manton

outside seemed strangely insistent. "I suppose it is the fruits of my illness. I have never done such a thing in my life before. One learns reticence in the hard school of life. By the by, how selfish I am, all talk and thought so far being of myself! I ought to have inquired before—is there no one concerned about my sudden and mysterious disappearance, as the papers would call it if they got hold of it, as I hope they never will?"

The girl's mood had changed. A sudden brightness of humour had come into her face and voice. Manton could now understand that naturally her outlook was optimistic, and her spirits buoyant. Only misfortune had tamed her high-mettled nature.

"Yes. I was going to speak to you about it. A police serjeant came to me last night with the information that a Mrs. Aitchison had been making inquiries about you. She is staying at a private hotel, 87 Bolsover Street."

The word "police" arrested the girl's attention more than anything else. She visibly shrank from the idea.

"Police!" she exclaimed. "What have they to do with it? How did they find out anything about me?"

"A serjeant and a constable came up soon after I first found you in the road. They have naturally been trying to find out the man who attacked you in such a cowardly and despicable way." The girl had been told by Mrs. Dundas the outlines of the story, when she asked what had happened, but as few

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details as possible, lest she should be excited by them.

“ Oh ! don't let them try ! Please ! ask them to leave it quite alone. I shall only suffer more if they find him than if he gets off. Why should I, who am innocent, be made to suffer in both ways ? ” She was trembling with excitement. The doctor realized how weak she was, and regretted very much that the subject had ever been mooted. “ I will see what I can do,” he replied soothingly. “ In any case, it was a great relief to your friend, Mrs. Aitchison, to hear that you were in good hands, and under my care.”

The girl lay back thinking. She looked delicate and fragile as the most exquisite piece of Dresden or Sèvres china. The one pang was that she seemed unconscious of Doctor Manton himself. Suddenly her eyes met his, and before the lids dropped over them again the doctor fancied he read something there which made his heart beat wildly, the blood course more rapidly through his veins, and his pulses throb in unison. From that time forward, even against what seemed overpowering evidence to the contrary later on, deep down in his heart of hearts Alec Manton believed that this girl, whom he had learnt to love beyond measure, was not indifferent to him. Her eyes told him in that one unguarded moment that her nature, too, was stirring in response to his. There was a tremor, too, in her tones when she spoke again, a vibration, as of some subtle chord touched, responsive, which had not been there before.

Dr. Manton

“Do not think me ungrateful, Doctor Manton,” she said. “Do not think I do not value your great kindness—whatever happens.”

His blood chilled again. What did she mean by these words? What possibility lay behind this vague phrase, “whatever happens”?

“I do not think any one could look at you and believe you capable of ingratitude,” he answered. “But why do you speak as you do?”

She did not answer. She was lacing and unlacing her long, thin fingers, with their exquisite tiny sea-shell nails.

“I can never forget what you have done for me, Doctor Manton. I shudder to think what might have been my fate if you had not come so opportunely to my rescue. I am sure God sent you to me, and I have given Him fervent thanks for it. Only I dread to think that I may possibly bring you harm; it has weighed on me terribly since I came back to consciousness. I do not want to link your fate to mine, even as sheltered under your roof. Ah, I seemed to see, did I not actually see”—she stretched out her hand and clasped his arm—“a face in the trees opposite yesterday afternoon? I have been afraid to look out there ever since. The very leaves seem to leer at me, and the boughs to shake in the wind as if threatening me with something sinister, something terrible. Oh! Doctor Manton, you do not know what an enemy I have! He would stick at nothing to gain his purposes. Unless he had to risk his own life, he would not hesitate to take

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yours if you stood in his way, if you attempted to shield me from him."

"I do not think you need be afraid on my account," Alec remarked quietly. "Neither, if there were any risk, which, forgive me, I am unable to credit, should I hesitate for a single moment. You forget, too, that I frustrated him at a moment when he came as near to success as possible, and he only ran away."

"Believe me," she urged, "he is like a snake. He draws back to strike. He will remember you for what you have done, and if years hence he had an opportunity of doing you an injury, he would take care to avail himself of it to the full. He never forgives, and he never forgets. But if you cease to shield me, to stand in his way when he is trying to accomplish the one object of his life, then he will not trouble himself to hurt you, which otherwise he assuredly will do."

"Look at me," Manton urged. He had drawn himself up to his full height, and was standing where the light fell full upon him. The girl cast a shy glance, just taking him in, then retreating into the citadel of her own modesty and shyness. It was quite true that you might go a day's journey and not find so fine a specimen of male humanity as Alec Manton.

"Do I look like a man," he asked, "likely to be either frightened or coerced from protecting a girl in distress, one to whom—I——" He stopped, silenced by the look of real distress which had come into his patient's face.

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"I know," she put in hurriedly, "that you are all a man can possibly be, but you are acting and talking in the dark. You do not know any of the circumstances. I cannot place you in possession of them, and it would be nothing short of criminal of me to involve you in a quarrel, in which your only concern is that you helped one of the combatants in her hour of need. It is a reason for undying gratitude, not for the creation of fresh obligations."

Afterwards every detail of this conversation came back to Manton, when the illumination of after events cast a fresh light upon it. At the time his mind was preoccupied. He was absorbed in the one idea. How much he loved this girl, and how impossible it was to tell her. Love at first sight is the target of the sub-acid ridicule of present-day wisdom; yet it may be doubted whether it is not the commonest form of the malady. A man or a woman may not always be conscious when he or she actually passed the rubicon of the central sentiment of life. It may seem to have grown upon him or her by slow degrees. But it may safely be set forth that where love is real, and pronounces itself later, there was an attraction from the very first word exchanged, almost from the very first look encountered.

Dr. Manton made no secret to himself of the fact that he had loved this girl from the first moment that her helplessness in the road at Cursitor Avenue appealed to the man in himself, as well as the doctor, for help and sympathy. The feeling had only intensified a hundredfold since this girl had looked into his eyes

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with the light of intelligence in her own, since she had shown that a clear brain and an affectionate nature were enshrined in the delicate casket. Yet he was tongue-tied. To tell her what he felt would obviously be contrary to her wish, and it might imperil his own chance of getting her, at some future day, to listen favourably to what he hoped to say to her. To attempt to rush the fortress has the effect sometimes of making the defenders specially on the alert to repel attack.

"May I come in later in the day to see how you are getting on?" Manton asked, as he finally rose to take his leave.

"Are you not my doctor, and so armed with the right to visit me when you please?" she asked, with a smile which was almost coquettish, almost provocative, again indicating the brightness underlying her present shadow.

"Now that you are convalescent, I feel I ought not to intrude upon you more than once a day," he answered.

"You do not intrude, and I cannot picture your ever doing so. I answer, come and cheer me up whenever you can spare the time. You must be very busy, of course—and I must not be selfish."

"This is the slackest time of our year—August—and most of our best clients are away as well. My partner has also just returned, so that altogether I am very unusually free and at leisure." Alec did not add that he was staying on in town purposely for her sake, but it was true, nevertheless.

Dr. Manton

"I am glad," she said; "it does me good to see you—you are so vigorous and well, so full of life. I think you gave me renewed life by the very excess and superabundance of your own vitality, Doctor Manton."

He laughed. "A sort of suffusion of essence, instead of a suffusion of blood! That is not at all a bad idea for medical science to aim at in the future. If we have thought transference, mental wireless telegraphy, why not transference of energy?"

"I believe in it," she said; "you have taught me. I wonder whether, if I have really received some of your vital essence, it will bring us mentally nearer together as well? Whether we shall learn more of what each other endures or enjoys, when absent, than other people do?"

Manton did not quite know whether to take the girl seriously or not. She seemed half in jest, with an underlying seriousness beneath it all.

"Let me remain near to you," he suggested, "and we shall not require to exploit this rather nebulous extra sense."

"Ah! to remain near! That is not mine to give. I am the sport of fortune, the blind goddess, and have to obey her behests. And one more thing, Doctor Manton. I do not feel equal to seeing Mrs. Aitchison to-day—use your authority as medical adviser, and forbid me the excitement of seeing her. She does not really excite me at all, but I never like to see her, kind friend as she is, when I am in a state of uncertainty, of doubt what is best to be done. When all is settled she is a loyal helper, but she has

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the disability of not seeing both sides of a question, and that is against her as a companion when one wants decision. She renders you the dubious service of making you see two courses are right, which are diametrically opposite to one another, the result being that you do nothing."

"But you are not of doubtful mind, are you?" the doctor asked, with anxiety in his voice. What did she contemplate? He had feared, from the moment that he had first heard of this elderly friend in quest of his patient, that it would lead to the girl being removed from his protection and care. Now his fears were strengthened by the girl's obvious reluctance to see Mrs. Aitchison. She, too, contemplated separation; of that he felt assured, and his heart died within him at the prospect.

"Doubtful! Yes, very! Did I not say that I was a votary of the blind goddess? It was she who took me to Cursitor Avenue against my better judgment, against my will. Where she will take me to next I do not know."

All the brightness had faded out of the girl's face as she said the last two sentences, the attempted gaiety, with which she had commenced to speak, having dropped off like an ill-fitting mask. Her large eyes had a pathetic look in them as they strove to look into the future, and her lips were pale. Alec Manton knew that she was afraid, and he could not stretch out his hand to help her, for she would give him no right to do so, and he was quite in the dark as to the cause of her fear.

Dr. Manton

When Manton finally withdrew from the room, because he could find no pretext for staying there any longer, it was with a fixed determination to try and get some definite information out of Mrs. Aitchison. It is to be feared that the rest of his patients that morning did not get the doctor's full attention ; but no doubt a certain professional instinct guided him sufficiently to prevent any glaring errors.

Precisely at two o'clock a cab drove up to the door, and immediately afterwards Mrs. Aitchison was shown into the drawing-room, which overlooked the strip of garden at the back of the house. The room was but rarely used, and, as rooms will do which are not lived in, succeeded in conveying that impression. Manton himself, in addition to the disturbance of spirit which had been upon him since his interview in the home-hospital in the morning, also felt the sense of being in a chilling environment. He would have been twice as much at home in the library, but felt it was not etiquette to receive his visitor there, and, of course, the consulting-room was out of the question.

Mrs. Aitchison proved to be a tall, willowy lady of an uncertain age, very richly dressed, evidently a gentlewoman, with rather a prominent hooked nose and weak lips, and with a slightly receding chin. Certainly not a woman to help any one in an emergency. Alec read her at once—one to lean on some one else, not to be leant upon. Verily this girl seemed to be fighting some very determined enemy with the weakest possible ally that could be found

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for her. Manton invited Mrs. Aitchison to be seated, and took a chair opposite to her, so that he could study her features as they talked.

“ It has been a great relief to me, Doctor, to know that my dear young friend, with whom I have lived ever since her mother died, nearly eight years ago, is safe here under your charge. I assure you, I slept last night for the first time since I knew she was missing. You see, I was called away from——” She stopped when about to say a name.

“ Yes ? ” he suggested.

“ From home,” Mrs. Aitchison went on, after a second’s reflection, “ to my dear sister, who was seriously ill ; she is now happily convalescent.” Mrs. Aitchison brought out a delicate cambric handkerchief and wiped the corner of her eye. “ Milly said she should get on quite comfortably without me, and I was not to worry.” Manton caught at the name, and registered it in his memory—“ Milly’s short for Mildred, no doubt.” That would be the name, then, written on his heart. He was glad to think it so happened that he had never known a Mildred before. Mrs. Aitchison had omitted to notice that the Christian name had slipped out. She went on with the even flow of her narration. “ As soon as my sister was well enough to be left, I returned to the Hall, and found that Milly had left home three days before for London, taking her maid Alice with her. I thought nothing of that, as business called her up to town sometimes to consult with the family solicitor in Lincoln’s Inn Fields.”

Dr. Manton

“ Do I know the firm ? ” Manton asked.

Mrs. Aitchison fell into the trap quite guilelessly. “ Oh, yes, I expect so. Martin and Goodbody. Everybody knows them. There is no Goodbody now, I believe, in the firm ; anyway, Mr. Frank Martin is the partner who has always been consulted in connection with any business we had to transact. I have generally gone up to London with Milly, but I quite understood that she had not informed me of the necessity for the visit, lest I should feel drawn in two opposite directions, between my duty to her and my natural affection for my poor sister.”

Dr. Manton had been listening intently, and had made a note on his mental tablets of the solicitor's name—Mr. Frank Martin, of the firm of Martin and Goodbody, why, he could hardly have told, except that any information which would help him out of the Cimmerian darkness in which he was groping, he caught at with the greatest eagerness.

“ I at once wrote to Milly at the private hotel in Bolsover Street, where we have generally stayed together, and where I am now stopping, to offer to come up to join her. Milly,” Mrs. Aitchison went on, “ has a will of her own ; sometimes she prefers to be alone, and sometimes she wants my company and advice. I generally try and find out which mood she is in.”

Manton could hardly help smiling, remembering what his patient had said to him a few hours earlier.

“ I received no answer to that letter. It is not to be wondered at, as Milly has never been there. I

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found the note up in the rack for undelivered letters when I reached the hotel. Not getting an answer, I grew anxious, and at last decided to telegraph to the proprietress of the hotel. She wired that Milly was not staying there, and I immediately had my things packed, and came up. I went first to Mr. Frank Martin. As Milly had not been to him, and he knew nothing of her movements, he communicated with Scotland Yard on my behalf. Mr. Frank has a good deal of influence with the highest officials of the police force, and was able to ensure the utmost secrecy possible. We are on the verge of family matters being the talk of all England with those dreadful halfpenny papers always on the look out for sensational paragraphs. I hate and dread them, Doctor, and I am sure it would drive Milly wild—I do not believe she would ever forgive me—if I were the cause of her name appearing on a headline.” Mrs. Aitchison again took out the lace handkerchief, only this time she fanned herself with it as an evidence of her perturbation.

“ We hope it will not come to that,” Alec assented, with a half-smile. Mrs. Aitchison was pathetically humorous.

“ Mr. Frank assured me I might make myself quite easy as long as no names were mentioned. So I have been very particular, very particular indeed, Doctor, even to you, and, of course, we always trust the doctor, as we do the clergyman and the family solicitor ; only, you see, these are not my secrets, if they were you should know them at once. You see,

Dr. Manton

if Milly wants you to know who she is, she will tell you herself ; she would not like me to betray any confidence."

" Exactly ; I understand," Alec answered. " But it seems to me that this young lady is sadly in need of some friend." He waved off Mrs. Aitchison's half-indignant movement of remonstrance. " I mean a male friend. Of course, I can quite understand how invaluable you are to her. But as she seems to be, I do not understand how or why, the object of a man's attack, I cannot but feel that she wants one of the same sex to help her to defeat those schemes. Mind you, I do not think this dark lame man——" Mrs. Aitchison rose up in her chair. She turned pale under a colouring which the doctor had been fully assured all along was not exactly that of nature.

" I hope and trust they will never find him. It would kill Milly. Oh ! she is not proud in most ways, Doctor, but in that one thing, the family name, the family pedigree, the family honour, she is crazy. She inherits it from her father—and yet—and yet, sometimes I think it is God's punishment for this very pride that the only two last representatives, men representatives of the race—well, Doctor, I must not say ; I trust I have not said too much already !"

" Don't be alarmed, Mrs. Aitchison. I can assure you not only that I can be absolutely trusted, but that also I practically know nothing. I feel like a man groping in the dark, in a road full of pitfalls which he has never traversed before."

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"We shall always appreciate your sympathy and help, Doctor," Mrs. Aitchison answered. "Do you think I may be permitted to see your patient? I feel sure she will be glad to know I am here."

Manton coughed.

"I am particularly sorry, but to-day is practically the first in which she has been fully conscious of what was going on, and, with her full concurrence, I have directed that she should wait until she feels, that it will not cause her to have a relapse to see even such a dear and faithful friend as yourself." Manton smiled inwardly as he prided himself on having disguised the bolus under a sufficient quantity of jam. Mrs. Aitchison bridled a little.

"I really think, Doctor, this is carrying discretion to the bounds of—of—well, I hardly know what to call it."

"If it had not been for her splendid constitution, this young lady would not have been in anything like the condition she is now, if, indeed, she were alive at all," Manton said gravely, "and I am sure you would not wish her to run the slightest risk of having her, at present, delicate mental balance upset again."

Suddenly Mrs. Aitchison shot at Manton a shrewd, questioning glance, for which he would by no means have given her credit. She deliberately adjusted her pince-nez, and looked at him through them, then asked abruptly: "Are you a married man, Doctor Manton?"

Alec was furious with himself, for he knew he had turned scarlet.

Dr. Manton

"No," he replied, "Mrs. Aitchison, I am not, but I do not see what that has to do with the subject we are discussing."

"It has this to do," she said deliberately, "that you have the most lovely girl in England under your roof, under your constant care. Oh, you need not protest, young man. I know human nature, man's human nature, well enough. It's no good your talking to me of professional etiquette, and forgetting the woman in the patient. I know all about that. I agree with Burns, 'a man's a man for a' that.' It's the exception which proves the rule, and Milly is the exception. If you don't love her already, young man, send her back to me as quickly as possible to Bolsover Street. You are not safe to remain in her presence, no, not for another week, hardly for another day."

Manton stood up, drawing himself to his full height. His face had paled, and his chin was set forward with that look of determination which his strong face could so well assume, and yet look strikingly handsome.

"You have practically extorted this truth from me, Mrs. Aitchison. I tell you what I have not told her. I love this lady with all the devotion of which my heart, my whole nature, is capable. I shall never change, I shall never rest content until I can win her love in return."

Mrs. Aitchison dropped her fanning and stared at Manton like one paralysed. At last she cried—

"You love her! You love her already, and she

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only in her senses to-day! This is midsummer madness."

"I loved her from the first moment I saw her," Alec answered. "My love gives me a right to protect her, to save her from her enemies, and, God helping me, I will save her—I will protect her with the last breath in my body."

"Take my advice, young man," Mrs. Aitchison said, in a chilling tone, "don't let any one hear you say so—not the man-servant that waits on you, not the very birds twittering out there in the garden. If some one thought that you loved her, and above all that she gave a thought to you, your life would not be worth the snuffing of a candle. You don't realize with what you have to do. Send her to me. Forget you have ever seen her. Pray you may never see her again. She will never love you, whatever happens! She dare not, even if she wanted ever so—she dare not *for your own sake!*"

XII

A LEADEN MESSENGER

THE strong man laughed. He was by himself in the smoking-room late in the same afternoon that Mrs. Aitchison had paid her visit, having just returned from his round of visits to his patients. That interview had been in his mind as he drove along, but the motor-victoria swept him so rapidly from one street to another, that he had had but small opportunity for consecutive thinking. Now he was alone, discussing a cup of strong tea with a little buttered toast as an adjunct. It was just the chance for quiet meditation, and the result of that fifteen minutes by the clock was the hearty laugh just recorded. To tell the truth, Alec Manton was in better spirits than he had been in for days, ever since, in fact, "Milly" without a surname had come into his life to stay. He was a born fighter for one thing, and his busy life as a suburban doctor had not deprived him of the aboriginal instinct. Now he was to fight for the woman he loved against certain foes whose very identity he had to discover. The uncertainty lent an added piquancy to the combat, and that it was against odds did not detract from Dr. Manton's anticipation of what was to come. But Mrs. Aitchison's visit and solemn warnings, as he looked back upon them, also added to the zest of

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the thing. She had probed his feelings and dissected them with a mental scalpel. She had made Alec put into words what otherwise he would assuredly have kept to himself ; yet the very saying of those words had given him hope and inflexible determination to fight for his own hand.

He had, as it were, hoisted his flag, and would not lower it until victory was on his side. In addition, Mrs. Aitchison had presented him at the very last with the most encouraging sentence she could possibly have allowed to pass her lips, short of telling him she knew " Milly " loved him, which was out of the question. The older lady had told him that Milly dare not allow herself to love him. Why ? For his sake ! If that were all the obstacle, Manton was not afraid. He could win through that more easily than any other obstacle.

Hardly had Manton finished his tea than he hurried off through the doorway of communication between his own house and the home-hospital. He found his patient sitting in a deck-chair out on the veranda. She was obviously gaining strength rapidly. He fancied, too, that there was a glow on her cheeks and a sparkle in her eyes when he entered the room and came through the window to the side of her chair, not wholly occasioned by the rays of the setting sun. Milly had never seen the doctor so confident, so full of obvious strength, so remarkably handsome.

" It must be good to be a man," she said ; " the right sort of man," she added, with quick emphasis.

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“What makes you think so especially now, Miss Milly?” Alec inquired, with a mischievous twinkle in his eye, to note the effect the name had upon his patient. She started and looked at him, trying to read into the depths of his eyes.

“Miss Milly!” she cried. “Mrs. Aitchison has been here and has been talking. How much has she told you?”

“Not much, hardly anything, in fact—not a tithe of what I want to know, of what I want you to tell me.”

Her glance lowered, and a shadow passed across her face.

“Do not ask me, Doctor Manton, for I cannot tell you.”

“Not even your surname?” he pleaded. “Names, it is true, are nothing but labels; there is nothing specially individual about them, like a face, for instance, or a voice. But still, even labels have their uses. A box without a label is apt to get lost on a journey; a packet sent by post without a label is not delivered to the rightful owner.”

“Ah!” she said, “the rightful owner.” She glanced at him almost coquettishly. “Do you know, I am the one person in the world who has not got one?” Then the shadow came again, obscuring the brilliance of her face. “And what is more, I never shall have one, never can have one. I have no father, no mother, and—those I have are ‘more than kin and less than kind.’ Send me away by train, and let me get lost in the great world. I will have no label on, and I ask of fortune no better fate

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—just to hide myself out of sight under the drab of a kindly oblivion. I am not thankful for the gift of life. I should much rather never have had it, but, having got it, I feel it my duty to guard it carefully. I think the man or woman who takes his or her life must be mentally unhinged.”

Manton turned the conversation to another channel.

“ Mrs. Aitchison was very disappointed when she was not allowed to see you. I think she turned most of the vials of her wrath upon me as the cause of her discomfiture.”

“ Your back is broad enough to bear it, Doctor Manton. I don't pity you a bit.” The girl's mood had gone back to gay once more.

“ I think it was very good of me not to give you away more than I did. I only said you ‘ concurred ’ in my precaution in not allowing any one to see you, even a friend of her standing. I might have said that it was entirely your fault from first to last.”

“ Poor old thing ! I am fond of her, but she is a little trying sometimes. However, she shall not be disappointed again now. I trust I have made up my mind. In fact, I must see her when she comes again.”

“ How do you mean ? ” asked Alec quickly. “ That you have made up your mind as to what ? You have not forgotten that under present conditions two people have to make up their minds instead of one, Miss Milly ? ”

“ Do you mean Mrs. Aitchison and myself ? ” the girl asked innocently, or with apparent innocence.

Dr. Manton

"No ; I mean Doctor Alec Manton and yourself, or, if you like to reverse the order, yourself and Doctor Alec Manton."

"Alec," she said ; "so that is your Christian name ? I wondered. I suppose it is short for Alexander ?"

"Just as 'Milly' is short for Mildred ?" he half stated, half guessed. "No, in my case I am just plain Alec ; I was christened so. I prefer it to Alexander. The latter suggests a world to conquer, or some such wild ambition impossible to the ordinary man. Now, Alec commits me to nothing except good fellowship."

"I never knew one before," she said half meditatively, as if thinking aloud. "I think I decidedly like it."

"Just what I said about 'Milly,' when the name slipped out by accident from Mrs. Aitchison's very compressed lips. I never knew any one else of the same name, and I was very glad I had not." He looked at her, but she was not looking at him.

"Why were you glad ?" she asked softly, after a while. The words were said so low that they hardly reached him.

There was only one answer to the question, and surely she must have known it ? What woman does not know by instinct the one and only language of the heart ? Alec walked to the edge of the veranda and, leaning his arms on it, looked first at the enclosure, with the warm evening sunlight gleaming on the somewhat dusty leaves ; then his eye rested on

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the street. He could see a uniformed policeman. It brought back to him the underlying tragedy of this girl's life. He turned back to her, and drawing a chair nearer—he had been standing hitherto—sat down by her side.

“ The question you asked me just now can only be answered in one way, and with three short words of one syllable, which for the present ”—he laid stress on the qualifying word—“ you forbid me to utter.” She seemed about to protest, probably with regard to his limitation ; but he went on in firm tones : “ I want to say just this. You have come into my life : Providence sent me to you just when you needed me. Do you think it possible a cord so bound about us both can be unloosed by either, as if it were a silken thread ? I believe firmly and with all my heart that God intends me to be your friend, if occasion arises to be your protector, to do for you all that a strong man may for—for ”—he hesitated for the word he wanted in place of the one which rose to his lips, and he dare not use—“ for the one woman who has ever been anything to him in his life, with the exception of his own mother.”

Milly could stand it no longer. Her feelings unstrung by all she had passed through, and her will-power weakened by her recent illness, she now fairly gave way. She covered her face with her hands and burst into a flood of tears, her shoulders shaking with the paroxysm of her sobs. It was too much for Manton's self-control. He could not help himself. He took her head into his hands,

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and showered kisses on her hair, and on the hands which hid her face.

Suddenly Manton heard a distant crack, and at the same moment felt something touch the side of his forehead, and almost at the same instant there came a dull thud against the outer door of the room beyond. Alec stood straight up. He was puzzled for a moment. Milly, too, let her hands slip from her face and sprang to her feet.

"Oh! why did I give way? Why am I so stupid, so foolish? And you! and you! you—kissed—my hair, my hands!" She seemed half choked with her own emotions, hardly knowing what she said.

"Could I help it?" he answered, "when you were in tears, and I—oh, my God! when I——" She interrupted him.

"But oh! Doctor Manton, what has happened? Why, you are bleeding! You have cut your forehead." She had heard nothing of what had passed, her own emotions dulling her usually very quick sense of hearing.

Alec put his hand to his forehead. "A mere scratch." Then for the first time it came to him that he had been shot at by some one concealed in the undergrowth of the enclosure opposite the houses, *some one who had seen what had taken place*. Manton's blood boiled with honest wrath, and at the same time with shame that his rash impulse, to which he had momentarily surrendered himself, had involved this girl as well.

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Hearing a sound, Alec ran to the balcony, in time to see the policeman, he had noticed before, crashing through the bushes in the direction from which the sound had come. Manton felt that he must go and join in the chase, although his instinct told him that whoever had fired the shot must by this time have got clear away.

Manton turned back. At the same time there was an exclamation and the sound of wicker-work being broken. Milly had fallen in a faint across the chair in which she had been sitting. The sight drove all thought of the shot and the perpetrator of the outrage from his mind. He only saw that the woman he loved needed him—and he went to her. Once more taking the lissom figure into his strong arms, Manton carried her and laid her on the bed. When she came to herself he was kneeling by her side, holding her hands.

“I have been very weak, very foolish to-day,” she said. “The truth is, I did not know how weak I was.”

Manton had forgotten about the blood on his forehead. Some of it had trickled down on to her when he held her in his arms. She felt for her lace handkerchief, and used it first for herself, then very diffidently for him.

“Now you must go,” she said, “or—or—I am very weak—and you—are—very—silly. Do please go—I ask you.”

Some time after he had gone Milly found the bullet embedded in the door of her room.

XIII

A COUNCIL OF WAR

THE search for the man who fired the pistol proved, as Manton had expected, quite fruitless. Just as it concluded and the doctor had reached his own door Serjeant Skinner came up. The constable on point duty behind the house related what had happened. He was, of course, eager to exculpate himself,

“It’s all a puzzle, sir—that is, how the man got into that tangle without one of us catching sight of him. Here we were, three of us about that enclosure ; yet he gets in there like a bird dropping down from the sky, and not one of us sees him. I call it downright uncanny. I believe the blessed place is bewitched.”

“He seems to have got away just as easily,” Manton put in dryly. “If I had been murdered instead of being only grazed, and a decimal of an inch would have done the trick for me, he would have escaped just the same.”

“I must have a full inquiry into the matter, Doctor,” Skinner said. “Division C is not anxious to be looked down upon as a company of blooming idiots by ‘A’ and ‘B,’ I can tell you, sir. It is easier to lose credit over a job than it is to make it. Seems to me folks are always on the look out for

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failures." Skinner was clearly out of temper, and did not know upon whom to fasten the blame, and vent his wrath.

"All I can swear, sir, is that not a man got into that dratted enclosure from this side," the constable declared emphatically. "I have been looking out ever since I came on the beat, so that not a cat could run in without my seeing her, let alone a man."

"I suppose they all say the same," the serjeant remarked caustically. "Every point was guarded, yet the fact remains that the man did get in and out, and was near enough to the house when he fired the shot to distinguish the doctor here. So he must have been nearer your side than the other, Denner."

Manton recollected what he was doing when the bullet grazed his forehead, and felt distinctly uncomfortable.

"I suppose that is true, Serjeant," Denner admitted. "I should like to catch the chap and teach him the Frogs' March."

Skinner followed the doctor into the house, while the constable returned to his duty in a vile temper. Almost immediately afterwards Lysergh drove up, and again assisted at the conference. When he heard that Alec had been fired at a short time previously, and nearly lost his life, he turned very white.

"What a cursed business this is, Alec. Something tragic will come out of it all if the police don't get hold of these men, or, at any rate, the ringleader—this dark, lame man, who seems a near relation of

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Satan himself. Here is your patient only just recovering from the attack made upon her, which was within an ace of being fatal ; then there is Downie felled to the ground and left alive more by luck than judgment ; now we have this murderous attack on you, Alec." The barrister turned to Skinner. " I tell you what it is, Serjeant, if the regular force proves powerless in this way, I shall place the whole affair in the hands of an inquiry agent outside. I am not going to sit by and see my best friend murdered, and feel that I have done nothing to avert the calamity. By the by, Alec, you used to have a neat little ivory-handled revolver, which you made pretty good practice with when we were stopping together at Welkin Lodge. Have you got it still ? If so, I should certainly carry it about with you to be on something like level terms with these wretches ; not that you would be even with them then, for they would fire when your back was turned."

" There is something in what you say, Algy," Manton admitted. He took out a bunch of keys, and, going across to an old-fashioned oak combined writing-table and chest of drawers, unlocked one of the tables and took out what looked like a toy revolver of very delicate workmanship, the gift some years earlier of a grateful Viennese count, whom Manton had pulled through a dangerous and trying disease at the home-hospital.

" I expect the cartridges, if you have any left, will be of no use now, Alec," his chum suggested. " Lend me the pistol. I will take it up to Hemming and

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Spowl, and bring you back a fresh supply before night."

"I don't think you need be so expeditious as all that, Algy." Manton could not help smiling at Lysergh's energetic determination to provide him with means of offence and defence, at the shortest possible notice.

" 'I shall not be happy until you have got it,' " Lysergh quoted, "so I shall certainly go to Mydon Street directly I leave here."

"The best way of all, sir," Skinner suggested, "would be to restore this young lady to her friends, as soon as she is well enough to be moved with safety. Of course, we should want due notice of her whereabouts, as the case will have to be sifted to the bottom. As to putting the matter into the hands of a private inquiry man, of course I must leave that to you, sir; but I am sure there are as cute detectives in the force as in any body of men in the world. I shall report the whole matter once more to the superintendent on my return, and I know he intends to put Inspector Jacob on the affair. I don't think he has got an equal anywhere, not even in New York or Pittsburg, where they make them pretty smart. This shooting matter will make the superintendent have Jacob on the trail at once. He would have taken up the case before, but was rather specially tied up with the investigation of a big jewel robbery in Grosvenor Place. I believe, however, he has now got the net round the right people in such a way that his subordinates can finish it."

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"I have heard of Jacob," Lysergh remarked. "I should certainly leave the unravelling in his hands with the greatest confidence, only I want to make sure nothing happens in the meantime. Manton may be shot when going his rounds in his motor."

"I don't think you need be afraid of that, Algy. I promise you to take that little toy pistol with me, and I think I shall be able to give as good as I get. By the by, Serjeant, how is your constable, Downie? Has he fully recovered consciousness?"

"Oh, yes, sir. He has a pretty thick head, and it served him in good stead on this occasion. He is too giddy at present to be allowed to get up, but otherwise does not seem much the worse. Had he been hit right on the top of the head the doctor said it would have been a very different story, but farther back the blow was less effective and dangerous."

"Exactly," Manton answered. "Can he give any account at all of what happened when the blow was struck?"

"No. He has not the faintest recollection of anything unusual. He heard no sound and had no warning. He was looking out of the window of number twenty-four, just as he had been told to do—that is his strong point, strict obedience to orders—when he suddenly felt a crushing blow on the head. Then all was darkness. He does not think he even cried out."

It took a good deal to make Manton downright angry, but this quiet statement of Serjeant Skinner's had that effect. He was more moved by this un-

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provoked and cowardly attack on the police constable from behind, than he had been by the bullet aimed at himself, which had very nearly succeeded in its purpose of giving him his quietus. After all, he had showered kisses on Milly's hair and hands in the veranda, as it happened in full sight of this hidden watcher. He remembered all the preparations for the marriage ceremony, whether mock or real, in the empty house in Cursitor Avenue. If this man really loved this girl to distraction, so that he would go to any lengths and commit any crimes to compel her to become his wife, he must be driven to little short of frenzy if he saw another man showering kisses upon her. Alec could almost have conceived himself capable of shooting a man at sight, whom he saw doing the same thing, had the positions been reversed. He could therefore in his heart find extenuating circumstances for the firing of that one shot. But the semi-murderous attack on Constable Downie from behind with "a life-preserver," as the weapon is ironically called, was in a very different category. It was done surely to get an inconvenient witness out of the way, as cold-blooded and heartless a proceeding as could well be imagined. The doctor paced the room up and down with rapid strides. At length he turned to Skinner.

"It seems incredible that these people, this man especially, should have escaped the network of the police. I will give a couple of hundred pounds reward to the person who gives information which will lead to his apprehension, and a further thousand

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pounds to be divided among the officers who capture him or them. It is not the attack on myself which makes me so angry—a man, having a pistol or revolver about him, may shoot at a moment's notice or an overmastering impulse—but the whole circumstances, beginning with the chloroforming of this young girl and ending with this afternoon's affair, point to the existence at large of such a dangerous group of criminals I feel that not a stone ought to be left unturned, to bring about their removal from the world of honest men. So far there has been an almost miraculous series of escapes from the worst consequences of their deeds ; but how long can this immunity from destruction be expected to last ? Who will be the next victim ? For it is clear we are only at the beginning of things."

" I will make your generous offer known to the inspector, sir. But I can assure you nothing is wanted by way of stimulus, as far as the force is concerned, to make them do their best to unravel the thread of this mystery, and to capture the criminals."

" I am quite sure of that," Dr. Manton replied. " Still, an offer of reward has been known to succeed when all other means of stimulating discovery have failed, as you know as well as I do, Serjeant ; and, of course, I should wish it to be known that I do not in any way limit it to the police ; the rewards will go to any civilian who earns them or guides the police to look in the right quarter." The serjeant nodded his head to indicate that he understood that perfectly.

" There are ways," he remarked, " of making

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these things known among the criminal classes of London ; but I have been convinced all along that this affair does not come in the usual category of such matters, and that the leader, at any rate, does not belong to the classes I have spoken of, if, indeed, any of them do. I have had a great deal of experience in ferreting out cases on somewhat similar lines, and the perpetrators of them have generally turned out to be individuals, to whom no suspicion of illegal practices had ever attached itself in their lives before. You have to search amongst respectable citizens in this particular class of case, and it makes the investigation much more difficult."

" Shall I tell you what I think ? " Lysergh, who had been sitting curled up in his usual fashion in an easy chair without speaking, now put in—" I believe that the basis of the whole thing is a matter of money, probably a very large sum."

" Now there I don't agree with you, Algy," Manton answered quickly. " What was the meaning of that rigged-up chapel at number twenty-four Cursitor Avenue, and of the Prayer Book open at the marriage service ? No, I think it is all infatuation for this lady whom we all know to be of an extraordinary beauty, to compel her to a marriage to which she is by no means inclined, which is, in fact, repugnant to her to the utmost degree." Manton spoke with grave earnestness. How often had he worked this problem out when sleep refused to come to him, hour after hour at night ?

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"Three men cannot be infatuated with this one woman, or if they were, they would not assist one another to effect her capture. That would be merely to ensure a murderous fight among themselves later on. No, I am quite sure money is at the bottom of it all, as it is at the root of nine-tenths of this kind of crime. Only in this case it must be a very great sum."

"Now, gentlemen, if you will allow me to express an opinion," Skinner said, "I am inclined to think that you are both right. There are no more powerful stimulants in the world than the infatuation for a woman and the greed of money; if both happen to go together, then the force at the back is likely to sweep all before it. I believe this is the case in this affair."

"There may be a great deal in what you say," Alec admitted. "In any case, please God, we will frustrate these villains."

Directly after this the three men separated. The serjeant went off to give fresh express directions to the men specially told off to guard the doctor's house, and then to return to head-quarters to report, and announce Manton's offer of rewards. The doctor himself went to his patient, to carry out an idea which had formed itself in his mind. The Hon. Algernon Lysergh started in Alec's motor, which he had the use of when the doctor did not personally require it, to visit the gunsmith's in Mydon Street, to get the necessary cartridges for the ivory-handled revolver. Manton's chauffeur drove, so

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that Lysergh had nothing to do but think, as they picked their way with nimble agility through the streets thronged with all kinds of vehicles. The barrister could not understand why it was, but one sentence that Manton uttered in the course of their late conversation clung to his recollection, and kept repeating itself in his brain with curious persistence. It was this : “ How long can this immunity from destruction be expected to last ? Who will be the next victim ? ”

XIV

WHAT THE STORM GAVE HIM

MILLY was dressed in the tight-fitting blue serge costume she had been wearing on the night of the attack upon her, the night that Alec Manton first saw her, first held her in his arms. He had not seen her in it since. Her appearance brought back to him vividly all the sensations of that never-to-be-forgotten night. So much had passed since then, so much of varied feeling had been compressed into the time, the doctor could hardly realize that he had first seen this girl so short a time ago, that days and not months intervened since the call had come to him, on the telephone, to go to Cursitor Avenue.

"You are looking wonderfully better," he said, as he somewhat unnecessarily took her hand and held it in his own. "I am afraid I can no longer make a pretence even to myself that you need such frequent visits and such constant vigilance as you have done until now. If I come to you as often I must come to you, Miss Milly, on a different basis."

She eyed him like a startled fawn, just disturbed from its lair under some thick undergrowth.

"Do not let us talk of motives and reasons," she suggested hurriedly. "As long as I remain under your roof, Doctor Manton, I shall like you to come

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to me whenever you have time to spare ; but do not let us attempt to analyse feelings or to prove motives. Let us do what is natural to us, what we both like ” —she shot at him a shy glance—“ but do not let us ask ourselves why we do it, why we like it.”

These two hardly knew what they were saying. Each heard a loud, distinct voice within, so loud and distinct each doubted whether the other must not be listening to its throbbing note too.

He said : “ I kissed her ! kissed her ! kissed her ! ”
She said : “ He kissed me ! kissed me ! kissed me ! my hair ! my hands ! ”

All life had become different to them, all their previous relationships had become changed in that one moment when his self-control was swept away, when his all-absorbing love took the bit between its teeth and galloped headlong into the abyss.

“ I will do what you wish,” he said aloud, but with a throbbing intonation, as if he had just been running very fast and was out of breath. “ The time will come, of that I am assured, when you will permit me to speak out what is in my mind, when you will, of your own accord, remove the embargo upon us both—you will need me,” and under his breath he added, “ as I need you.”

The girl shook her head ; her lips quivered, and she evidently found speech impossible. Outside dark shadows were flitting in and out among the trees, as the boughs swayed in the evening breeze, and the sun near its setting shot athwart them. A lurid glow was in the clouds, dark, serrated masses

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were piled up above the horizon, with just a fringe of lighter texture shot with gold. It was a beautiful sight, but also an ominous one, pregnant with the threat of a coming thunderstorm.

"We shall have a storm before long," Manton suggested, to relieve the tension between them, and to save her from a complete breakdown.

"Yes, I have felt it coming on all the afternoon. The electricity in the air gives me a curious sort of headache."

"It does most people, I fancy," Manton answered, "although I cannot plead guilty to being one of them. I have the good fortune not to be affected by atmospheric changes. It is never too hot for me in the summer, never too cold for me in the winter."

"You are indeed lucky," she remarked, looking at him, and admiring his frank, open face and fine build.

"'Call no man happy till he's dead,' as the old Greeks used to say," he replied, half in jest, half in earnest. "By the by, Miss Milly, I really came to talk to you quite seriously. Serjeant Skinner has just left me, and I came straight to you."

"Yes?" She stood and clasped her hands, an attitude which in her case showed that she was deeply stirred in some way.

"The police are quite in fault about this matter. The constable, Downie, who was knocked down in number twenty-four Cursitor Avenue, can throw no light upon the affair. He was struck from

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behind without any previous warning. The man, too, who fired the shot at me this afternoon, managed to get away undisturbed, although there were three policemen on the watch. I have now told Skinner that I will give two hundred pounds for information leading to a capture, and one thousand pounds for the actual taking of one or all the men who have hitherto baffled us ; but it is doubtful whether even that stimulus to activity will have any effect. I come now to you, Miss Milly——”

“ I ? ” she interjected, and stared at the doctor with dilated eyes.

“ Yes, you. You are the only person who can throw any light upon where to look for this dark, lame man ; you are the person aimed at ; the one most interested in ridding us all of this incubus of mystery. Why should you not throw off this reserve, tell us plainly—tell me, at any rate ”—Manton cast at her a pleading look fully charged with love—“ who you are, what are the motives of this man, and where he is most likely to be found. I have come to-night to beg of you, Miss Milly, to do this for all our sakes, for your sake, for the sake of justice. They have attempted to take two lives, if not three, or if life itself was not aimed at, it was recklessly and criminally endangered. Surely this man, these men, ought to be removed from social life, and placed where they can be punished for what they have done, and prevented from perpetrating any more crimes. It seems to me that you only can help to do this, and I earnestly implore you to cast

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aside your reserve." Alec spoke with all the eloquence he was capable of.

"I cannot! I cannot!" she said. "Do not ask me, please. I hate to refuse you anything." She was once more clasping and unclasping her fingers. "Besides," she added, with feminine sophistry, "I do not know where to look for him, as to others I do not know anything of them. I only know of one man in the wide world who hates me, and would sell his soul to bend me to his will."

"Have you forgotten or overlooked the fact that some people are in danger besides yourself?" Alec observed, trying the last weapon in his armoury.

"Am I likely to forget it," she protested, "after this afternoon?" The girl glanced at his forehead, where the severance of the skin had been repaired by a piece of sticking-plaster. "I know that you have endangered your life for me, Doctor Manton, and that the only way out of the matter is for me to cease to compromise you in my affairs."

"Do not talk like that," he protested, astonished at the aptitude with which she had turned the tables upon him. "You know that I think nothing of any risk for myself, as long as I can share it with you, shield you. All I ask is to be your protector."

At this moment the lightning played about the room. Almost immediately after there was a loud clap of thunder, which reverberated through the room, and rattled all the ornaments and bric-à-brac. Simultaneously the rain came down in torrents. Flash after flash followed, with accompanying

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thunder at the briefest intervals. The storm was bursting just overhead.

By an uncontrollable impulse, when the lightning was most vivid, Alec came close to Milly. He saw she was trembling, doubtless moved more than she would have been, under other circumstances, by all that she had gone through during the last few days.

"I was always rather a coward from my childhood," she said in a quavering voice, "when lightning and thunder were about."

Looking back Alec hardly knew how it came about, whether she drew to him or he to her. At any rate, her head rested on his broad shoulder, her face buried in his coat. There he held her tight, his strong arms about her. He was bending over her, so that his lips were near to her hair, but whether they actually touched he could not have said.

Afterwards in a time of darkness, Alec tried his very utmost to gather up in memory all the threads of this web of love and protection, but failed utterly. It was a blurred picture, yet a terribly bitter-sweet one, regarded as a retrospect.

Angrily the storm swept on for about twenty minutes; then the flashes grew less frequent, the thunder-claps more distant. The rain was still falling heavily. Suddenly the girl seemed to realize that all danger, if there indeed had been any, was past. She released herself gently, but firmly, from his grasp, shot one look at him from under her lids, and muttering something about not knowing "how

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weak she was," and " what he must think of her," ran from him into the adjoining bedroom, and he heard her lock the door. Alec felt sure he would not see her again that night, and very softly he left the room, and went down to his sanctum to have a good think.

XV

A PUZZLING AFFAIR

ALEC MANTON lighted a pipe mechanically ; then he stood his legs slightly apart, his hands behind his back, in rather a favourite attitude of his, looking out on the enclosure. The rain had almost ceased, the storm having passed as quickly as it had come. Runnels of rain ran along the big leaves of the chestnut trees and dripped on to the grateful turf below. All the dust which had collected on every available spot, choking the drooping vegetation, had been swept off in a few minutes. The trees and undergrowth were drinking in unpolluted air and fresh rain-water, with an enjoyment all the greater from their parched and dusty condition for so long prior to the storm. On every other occasion Dr. Manton, the botanist, the lover of nature in all its moods and tenses, would have rejoiced with the inarticulate thanksgiving of vegetation.

This evening he thought nothing of it. He was too much absorbed with the throes of feeling through which he was passing. He had held her in his arms through that delicious time while the storm was at its height. How he loved her with all the intensity of his being, so long pent up, now overleaping all barriers, like a moorland stream which bursts its way

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into the open from the heart of some mountain base. And did she not love him? Could he doubt it as she sought his side for protection, as she submitted to that mute caress, as she stood with her head touching his breast, feeling every beat of his heart against her cheek? Yet she had fled from him as soon as the storm had passed, had locked her door, as if she wished to lock the gate of her heart as well. What was this barrier which came between them, this obstacle he could not pass?

Darkness had begun to come now outside in the trail of the storm and after the setting of the sun. It seemed to Manton typical of the mental conditions under which he lived, and moved, and had his being. The darkness was girding him about, a darkness which might be felt. Yet in looking back upon this time afterwards it appeared, in comparison with what was to follow, as the sunlight to the depth of winter night.

Alec had stood thus for half an hour, unconscious of the passing of time, when he was roused from the labyrinth in which he was plunged by the hooting of his motor announcing its return. Doubtless Algy Lysergh had come back with the cartridges. The doctor used all his will-power to compel himself to meet his friend, as if nothing was disturbing his accustomed serenity. Alec did not wish to attract his friend's cross-examining eye. There was a knock at the door. Instead of Lysergh entering, a manservant presented himself instead.

‘Would Dr. Manton kindly come down. There

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had been an accident just as the victoria turned the corner of the road.

"An accident!" Alec exclaimed, full of fears about his friend, and realizing how much he was to him in the searchlight of his sudden alarm. "Do you mean that Mr. Lysergh has been hurt?" As he spoke he sprang towards the door.

"No, sir. It's some strange gentleman, I understand. He was knocked down, Penrose said." Penrose was the doctor's chauffeur. He had never met with a mishap of any kind before, during the four years he had been with his present master, and had come to him with a clean sheet previous to that time. Manton was very much surprised at the news, as he regarded Penrose as the most careful and the safest motor driver in the suburbs.

"I will come down at once. Where have they taken the accident, John?"

"Into the hospital, sir. Penrose says he cannot understand how it happened. But he will tell you about it, sir."

"Drivers always say they cannot understand how it happens," the doctor remarked caustically, more to himself than to the man. He went out into the passage, and before going to the home-hospital ran downstairs to the front door. Lysergh had gone into the hospital with the injured man. The victoria was in front of the door with a small crowd collected round it, staring with all their eyes at the various parts of the machinery, as if they expected to find some record or explanation of what had happened

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recorded there. The chauffeur was standing by the side of the motor. Alec went over to him. As he did so he happened to look up at the windows of the home-hospital, and was surprised to see Milly standing on the veranda looking down into the road. Doubtless she had been attracted by the noise of the crowd assembling. Her face was blanched white. Manton came to the conclusion, that she had very naturally been shocked by seeing the victim of the accident carried in. He would have liked to go up and reassure her, but other things pressed. Directly he looked up she disappeared. Alec remembered the locking of the bedroom door, and coupling this in his mind with Milly's immediately leaving the balcony when he appeared, experienced an uncomfortable feeling of disappointment.

"I am afraid I am a poor hand at understanding women," he said to himself. "I suppose it is lack of that kind of experience. I know how to treat them professionally, but when it comes to the intricacies of a woman's heart I lose my way."

Manton touched Penrose on the shoulder and beckoned to him to follow. Together they went into the house, leaving the motor unguarded. It was in the open street with the crowd round it. Neither of them would have considered it risky to leave it like that, even if their minds had not been too preoccupied to give the matter a thought.

Alec entered the surgery and the chauffeur followed, shutting the door behind him.

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"Tell me all about it," Alec said.

"I cannot understand it at all, sir," Penrose remarked, twisting his round peaked cap in his hand in nervous fashion. "I came quite slowly round the corner, and was certainly not going much faster than four miles an hour. I saw a tall man on the pavement, standing apparently waiting for some one. Just as the motor came abreast of him he stepped right on to the road, and I suppose struck against it, for he fell heavily between the victoria and the curb."

"Had you sounded the horn in good time as you turned the corner, Penrose?" the doctor inquired.

"Oh, yes, sir. I had given it the usual blast, as I always do with you, sir, when we are returning from a round."

"Well, I do not see that you were to blame, as you had sounded the horn, were driving slowly, and were on the right side."

"Begging your pardon, sir, but if I may say so there are a couple of curious things about it I don't understand. The first is, the man saw us coming; I am certain of it. Although he did not turn his full face, he eyed us sideways like. He stepped off the pavement just as if he had meant to all along, directly we came near enough."

"It certainly is very funny," Manton admitted. "I suppose the man was not intoxicated?"

"I don't think so, sir. I helped to pick him up, and he did not smell of liquor at all. Another very puzzling thing, sir, is that I don't believe the carriage touched him at all, or if it did, not enough to disturb

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a fly's wing, as the saying is. I was going so slowly I should have felt the jar, but I felt nothing. Mr. Lysergh called out when he saw the gentleman lying in the road, or I should have come up to the front door and not known anything had happened."

"It is a most remarkable affair," Manton admitted. "If it goes badly with the injured man you may be had up for manslaughter, Penrose; but no jury could convict nor could any judge blame you under the circumstances. After all, motor drivers cannot be responsible, if wandering lunatics get into their road and insist on being run over."

"The police saw the affair, sir, and will bear me out, I am sure, as well as the Honourable. It was they who carried the gentleman into the hospital, Mr. Lysergh, Mrs. Dundas, and one of the nurses going with them. He looked very white, but I don't see how he could be hurt, anyway, except by the fall. I am certain sure the motor never hurt him."

"Well, I will go and have a look at him," Manton said. "You had better go and see to the motor. Some of the folks may take a fancy to handling it. Don't have it put away; I may send round to Doctor Farner to consult with me about the case."

Manton passed through the door admitting to the hospital, and met Mrs. Dundas on the upper landing. She told him that the police had just gone. They did not think the case very serious, although the gentleman was still unconscious. Mrs. Dundas added that she had had the accident put to bed in one of the back rooms. Milly occupied the suite of

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rooms corresponding in front. The doctor entered the room indicated, and went straight to the bed. Nurse Driver was bathing the patient's forehead with eau-de-Cologne. He lay quite rigid in his clothes on the counterpane. They had not undressed him, until Dr. Manton should give his orders to that effect. Alec in a few minutes satisfied himself that no bones were broken. The patient seemed more in a cataleptic fit than anything else. His eyes were closed, and when the doctor lifted the lids there was no intelligence in them. Apparently reason had left her seat for a time.

Manton crossed over to Lysergh, who was standing looking on, at the foot of the bed.

"It's a funny business," the latter remarked. "I never saw any one so determined to be knocked down in my life. Your chauffeur was not in the least to blame, Alec. He could not have been driving more carefully, and had this man been his own father he could not have saved him."

"So it seems," Manton said. "As far as I can tell at present, the motor had nothing whatever to do with it. I believe the man fell down in a cataleptic fit, and that it was only a coincidence the victoria happened to be passing at the time. He certainly is not injured in any way. I will get Farner to come round, and we will give him the electric battery. I believe that will bring him to in no time, and he will be able to get up and walk out of the house, as if nothing had happened."

"I will go and fetch Farner, if you like. I expect

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Penrose will not care to go alone after this mishap. I could see it had affected his nerve a bit, as was only natural. We thought when we pulled the victoria up that the man was dead. I never saw any one lie so rigid in my life before, and some one called out that he was killed. Of course, Penrose, being responsible for the driving, was more shaken up than I was, although it gave me a nasty jar down the spine."

"It is awfully good of you," Alec answered. "I don't like to trouble you, old chap, to go out again. It is my time for seeing people, as you know, in the surgery, or I would go myself." Just as the words were spoken they heard the jingle of an electric bell from the doctor's house adjoining. "That is the first visitor, I expect," Manton remarked.

"All right, don't be anxious about me. I like to be of use, and will certainly go for Farner. I always like him, and have not had a chat with him since he came back from his holiday. By the by," Lysergh remarked as they turned to go out of the room together, "I got those cartridges all right. They are in the motor; I will send Penrose in with them before we start again. Mind you don't forget to charge your revolver."

When Lysergh said the word "cartridges" the doctor happened to be giving a last look at the patient. For a moment he thought he saw a slight quiver of the eyelids, but attached no importance to it.

"I believe the chap will come round, after all,

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without the battery," Manton remarked as they left the room. "I fancied there was a slight flicker of the eyelids just now. As a rule, it's the first sign of returning consciousness."

Nevertheless Lysergh went on his errand to Dr. Farner.

XVI

A WARNING AND A SURPRISE

MANTON was occupied for the best part of an hour with patients in the surgery. It was a slack time of the year, and a slack night even for that month, or he would not have finished as quickly as he did. When the whole of his work was completed, and the last of those who came to consult him had departed, the doctor went back to his own sanctum. By this time it was dark. He walked to the mantel-shelf and switched on the electric light in the hanging chandelier in the centre of the room. Then he went across to his writing-table, to place his note-book of cases in the locked drawer in which he always kept it. His eye was attracted at once by a square piece of foolscap, placed ostentatiously in the middle of his open writing-pad, and fastened down with two drawing pins, so that the breeze coming in through the window could not blow it away. Dr. Manton had no need to take it up to read it, as the message of warning it contained was half written, half printed, in letters at least half an inch long. It ran as follows :—

“ The man you have taken into your hospital is not really hurt. He is shamming. Beware. He will do you an injury.”

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Alec stood transfixed staring at the message. Strangely enough, it was not the purport of it which interested him most, but the twin questions—How did it come where it was? Who wrote it? The doctor at length stretched out his hand for the paper, and having torn it from its fastenings looked at it more closely. He felt sure it was in a feminine handwriting. Whose was it likely to be? Not Mrs. Dundas' certainly; equally obviously not any of the nurses. Who else could it be—except—Yes! He felt sure there was no doubt it was a message from Milly's own hand. She had made her way into that room to warn him. She had stood at that table and fashioned the letters, half printing them to disguise her hand, or perhaps to make them more legible in the half light, before the electric burners were set going. It was her writing! How he loved her! He pressed it to his lips. He would not have parted with it for its weight in gold. He would keep it among his most precious possessions as long as he lived. The words were nothing; the warning had not entered his brain; he did not care a brass farthing whether the man was a cataleptic case or fraudulent deception; whether he had deliberately had himself knocked down close to the hospital so as to be conveyed there, and so secure admission within its walls. All Alec cared for was that scrap of paper which came to him straight from the hand of one whom he loved more than his own life. Stay! Did he not care about the message itself—about what this man had

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come to do? Was it really aimed at himself, or was it not really directed at the girl whom he had saved and sheltered from her enemies? She had warned him; but as a matter of fact it was the girl herself who needed the warning most. If he, Dr. Manton, had not interfered in this matter, if the curious and mysterious web of life had not linked their destinies together, Milly's and his, no one would have given Alec a thought. His life would have pursued the same even tenor as heretofore, without excitement and without romance. They only aimed at him because he was an obstacle to their pursuit of her.

Dr. Manton had sat down holding the paper in his hand. He now sprang up. What might not have happened in the hour during which he had been closeted with patients in the surgery? These men clearly would stick at nothing. They had chloroformed the girl, felled Downie to the ground, aimed a bullet at himself, and now feigned an accident to get one of their number admitted into the citadel. Was it likely they would wait in order to act, when waiting would assuredly bring about the discovery of the deception, and the ignominious expulsion of the perpetrator of the fraud by Dr. Manton's servants? Manton's brain was working in instantaneous flashes, as if a searchlight were revolving and had been turned upon it. He was not thinking consecutively at all, but recalling distinct impressions, over which his will-power had no control. Why had this man come to the hospital? To get speech with

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Milly? No. She had evidently a dread of him, or she would not have penned that message of warning. They must have planned to remove Milly out of his grasp, to take her away, to conclude what Manton had frustrated that night, when he first saw her in Cursitor Avenue.

The man who feigned himself victim of an accident, whom Manton had taken to be a cataleptic, had come in to effect this very purpose. How it could possibly be done with the servants and nurses inside the hospital and the police outside no one could say, but that they had a plan was obvious, or the apparently injured man would not have come at all. Their resources were evidently of no mean order, seeing that they had outwitted the police and escaped scot-free on at least two occasions. In a frenzy of doubt and fear lest he should be too late, Dr. Manton rushed to the door, and flung it open. The passages and staircase in his own house were already illuminated. Alec ran to the entrance communicating with the hospital. When he had passed it he saw one of the men-servants quietly going round the house to switch on the electric lights. The sight of the ordinary occupations of life being carried on acted as a sedative to Manton's fevered brain. It seemed impossible that there should be plot and counter-plot, even the shadow of possible tragedy, within touch of a British domestic doing his customary duties in the stolid fashion attained by the well-trained servant.

The man turned on hearing his master's footsteps,

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and Alec at once slackened his pace. At the same time he thrust into his pocket the paper which he had forgotten to lay down before he left the snugery. Trying to seem unconcerned, he walked towards the servant, and at once put the question to him—

“ Well, John, how is the poor fellow who was knocked down? Has he begun to recover consciousness yet? ”

The man stared at Manton with evident traces of surprise on his face. “ I beg your pardon, sir, but haven't you seen him? Although he looked rather white, he seemed to quite recover about half an hour after you left him, sir. I could not say the time exactly; it might be a little more or a little less.”

“ Well, what happened then? ” Manton demanded imperatively, driven wild by the servant's slowness.

“ He came out of the room in which he had been resting and asked to see you at once. He said he felt well enough to return home, and that they would be anxious about him presently. He spoke very handsomely, sir, about Penrose, and gave me a sovereign for him and, begging your pardon, another for myself. He said the chauffeur was in no way to blame for the accident—that it was all his own fault, and possibly he had had a fit of some kind, although he had never had one before, as far as he could remember.” John was evidently more than satisfied with the whole transaction, having the strange

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gentleman's gold jingling in his pocket. Manton could have shaken the man for his glib complacency, and had to hold himself strongly in check not to explode.

"Confound it, John, don't be so slow! What did this man do next? Where is he now? Do be quick and answer."

"I showed him, sir, through to the next house, and pointed out the surgery door. We could hear voices inside, so he said he would not interrupt you, but would wait on one of the chairs in the hall. He told me I need not trouble further, sir, as he would go to you as soon as the case you were seeing came out. I was rather busy at the time and you might be detained, sir; so I left him there as he wished it." John ended his narrative in rather crestfallen fashion. Dr. Manton was an excellent and very kind master; but, a strong man mentally and physically, all the servants stood not a little in wholesome awe of him. The man could see that the doctor was strangely disturbed, and that something had gone wrong—he could not in the least tell what.

"You certainly did quite wrong, John, to leave this stranger alone in the hall. How could you be sure he was not a thief or something worse? You knew perfectly we did not even know his name and address."

"He gave me a sovereign, sir," the man suggested quietly. He felt convinced a thief would never have done that.

"Take care you ring it before you attempt to

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change it," Manton remarked, with sardonic emphasis, and in spite of all he was passing through could not help a flicker of amusement at seeing the footman take out the sovereign from his pocket, put it to his mouth, and bite it, to test its genuineness. The man had taken his master quite literally.

"I think it's a good one, sir," John remarked, with some return of his former complacency.

"It is to be hoped so, for Penrose's sake as well as your own," the doctor replied. "Was there any one waiting in the hall when this stranger took his seat there to wait for me, or to pretend to wait for me?"

"No, sir; it was quite empty and rather dark. The lights had not been turned on then, sir."

"I suppose I was just seeing the last patient who came to me," Manton remarked, quite as much to himself as to the footman. "Otherwise there would have been some one else waiting in the hall. At any rate, the fellow never knocked at my door, and I did not set eyes on him. He was gone when I left the surgery."

"It certainly is very strange, sir, for I fully understood he particularly wanted to see you. I thought he had seen you, for I saw him again a little later on this very landing, as I went to light up Mrs. Dundas' sitting-room."

"You—saw—him—on this landing?" the doctor asked in amazement, punctuating all the first words with stops between each. "Do you mean that after you had shown him downstairs into the next house,

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and left him sitting in the hall, he came back again to his room in the hospital? Be careful of what you are saying and tell me the whole truth, for it may be a matter of the very greatest importance—more than you can imagine.”

John, who was barely twenty-one, felt inclined to burst into tears. He had never been spoken to so sternly all the time he had been in the doctor’s service. He wished the stranger and even his gift at the bottom of the sea.

“I am sure, sir, I will tell you all I know,” the footman half whimpered. “I was just going into Mrs. Dundas’ private room when I saw, or thought I saw—it was three-parts dark, sir—the same gentleman come along the upstairs passage. I was rather surprised, sir, for I fancied he did not come out of his own room.”

“Where did he come from then?” Manton demanded. “Come, be quick and out with it, confound you.”

“I thought he came from the sitting-room exactly opposite the bedroom where he was first carried.”

Dr. Manton’s heart seemed to stand still, and he felt himself grow pale.

“Are you sure, John, are you sure?” He took the footman by the shoulders and shook him, until the teeth rattled in his head like castanets. “Do you know what you are saying? Do you know whose room it was you say you saw this villain, this thief, come out of?”

But John buried his face in his hands and fairly

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blubbered. Not another word could be got out of him. Manton might well be in a frenzy. The stranger had been seen leaving Milly's sitting-room. What might not have happened while he was shut up in the surgery?

XVII

A FRESH SEARCH

DR. MANTON left the footman with an aching sense of impending evil, and bounded up the short flight of stairs which separated the passage, in which he had been standing, from the landing outside Milly's suite of rooms.

When he reached the door of her sitting-room, he paused with his hand on the door-knob for a moment or two before turning it. Alec was not a man given to nerves or forebodings, far from it; but a foreboding was on him now. He had to summon up all his store of resolution to compel himself to enter. The room was not so dark as the hall outside had been, as the long French windows, which gave on to the balcony, let in whatever light was left in the sky. These windows were wide open; a refreshing breeze of the oncoming night came through them, and played on Alec's heated temples. It was strong enough to bang the door behind him. So great was the tension on his nerves that he fancied for a moment that some one had pulled the door to. He even turned the handle, and partially reopened it, to make sure it had not been locked after he had entered the room. It was not perhaps a matter for

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wonder that Dr. Manton was impregnated at this time with suspicion, seeing that he had been shot at and nearly killed that very afternoon, that a man had feigned to be hurt and so got admittance to the hospital, and had then behaved in the extraordinary fashion which John the footman had just related, and finally remembering that he had found an explicit enough warning lying on his table. A man must be made of cast-iron, to such an extent as not to share the common humanity, not to be seriously affected by such a consensus of circumstances as these, all focussed in so short a space of time. Having satisfied himself that it was only the wind which had shut the door behind him, Alec took a survey as far as he could of the objects contained in the room itself. The light was so dim that he could barely distinguish one piece of furniture from another, tables from chairs, settee from piano. All the corners were absolutely pitch dark. Some one might lurk unperceived in each of them. For a minute, while Manton surveyed the salon, he wished he had armed himself before coming on his errand with the small ivory-handled revolver, which might have served him in good stead. His enemies, *her enemies*, were, he knew, alert enough, ready for any move in the game which gave them an opportunity of scoring a point, and absolutely unscrupulous even to the taking of a man's life whom they regarded as standing in their way. Manton was most anxious to find Milly—that was his first care ; but he was also anxious to keep his own life and health intact, if only for her sake. If he were

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out of the way, there was indeed no one to protect this girl so beset by dangerous foes.

The settee, where she had rested on more than one occasion when the doctor had visited her, was in the half darkness. When Manton's glance turned that way something in the shape of the pillow cushion, at the head of the couch, made him fancy that Milly was lying there now. If so, she was very still. There was no movement, no stir of any kind. If she were asleep, his entrance and the subsequent banging of the door must have roused her. She would, at least, have turned her head. A terrible nausea came over him. His knees seemed to lose their power. He felt as if he must clutch at something to support him. If Milly was, as he fancied, lying on that settee, she was either under a narcotic sleep or she was—dead !

Again he forced himself to go across the room and find out what was the truth. On his way he banged against a low chair which he did not see. Alec took no heed, but strode on. Fear gripped him and made him insensible to all minor things. He reached the settee. A sigh of relief, in intensity as loud and deep as a groan, passed his lips. What he had thought was a girl's head proved to be only the cushion. No one was lying on the settee, living or dead. Then Alec did what he ought in common sense to have begun by doing ; he went to the mantelpiece, and, finding the knob after a little fumbling, switched on the light.

The sudden brilliance, after the darkness, was

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dazzling. It took Dr. Manton a few seconds to grow accustomed to it. Then he convinced himself that the room was quite empty. A silver tray, on which a light supper had been served, was on one of the tables. The meal was untouched. Dr. Manton crossed the salon to the balcony, and stepped out upon it from the window. He had an uncomfortable sense that he was being watched by some person or persons, unseen themselves, over there in the wooded enclosure.

It was not surprising that Alec felt this. He had seen a face from the trees reflected in the glass ; he had been fired at that afternoon by some one hidden in the enclosure. Manton had come to hate that bit of shrubbery. He had taken these houses—his own and the hospital—for that very reason, because they had this cool and quiet retreat facing them, which could never be built over. Now he had learnt to hate what had attracted him before. Manton looked down upon it now. Darkness lay beneath the tree-tops ; he could only see something of their shape outlined against the sky-line. They were treacherous, those limes and beeches, planes and oaks. For they had hidden his enemies ; perhaps they concealed them now, with the help of the all-absorbing, advancing darkness of the night.

It did not take a minute to ascertain that Milly was not on the balcony, a favourite place of hers, as she had told him, when the evening shadows had begun to fall. The doctor turned back into the salon and at once went to the door communi-

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cating with Milly's bedroom. He could have entered it, of course, from the balcony, as both rooms opened on to it; but if she were in the room it seemed like an intrusion. Alec had noticed that the blinds were down, as he would expect them to be at that time of night. It was part of the housemaid's duty to see to that. Dr. Manton knocked at the bedroom door. There was no answer. He tried again; then more loudly. There was no response. He listened at the keyhole. There was not a rustle of a dress—no one stirred inside.

Again Alec was in a frenzy of apprehension. What if she lay in there—dead? He tried the door and found it locked. He banged with his fists and called once more. This time there was a response to the noise he was making, but not from within the room. Mrs. Dundas, going along the passage, had heard the sounds and opened the sitting-room door. She was surprised to find "the master" there. He never visited a patient at night without taking the housekeeper round with him, or, failing her, the head nurse.

"What is the matter?" Mrs. Dundas asked. She was startled by the fear expressed in Manton's face.

"Something terrible has happened, I cannot tell what. This door is locked and I can get no answer. I believe Miss Milly is lying in there dead." His lips trembled as he spoke. He could hardly articulate the words. Mrs. Dundas took the matter more

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placidly. She crossed to the doctor's side and proceeded to knock herself, and to call out a cheery assurance of her own presence.

That the doctor loved Milly passionately Mrs. Dundas could not fail to be aware, and she set down the girl's silence to the very natural explanation of shyness. There was no reason why Alec should not ask any one to marry him. He was rich and of excellent birth, universally liked and respected ; but a girl's heart is a wayward thing, and withal very coy. Who can prophesy beforehand what any given maiden may say or do when she knows an offer of marriage is pending ? That was the way in which the kindly woman looked at it ; that was her reading of the riddle ; but when no answer, not a movement, not a sound was vouchsafed to her knock and voice, she began to have her doubts that her first solution was the correct one. Mrs. Dundas began almost to be afraid.

"What can have happened to the poor dear young lady ? I hope she has not fainted right away."

"I hope she has," Manton replied grimly. "That is the least evil I can conceive. Do you know who was the last person seen leaving this sitting-room, Mrs. Dundas ? The man who pretended he was knocked down by the victoria this afternoon ; the man who shammed to be seriously hurt, and so was brought into this hospital. To what intent did he do it ? Why did he come here, to this very room ? Answer me that ? " It almost seemed as if Alec would strike

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Mrs. Dundas, as he had shaken the footman a short time before. She drew back from him in amazement and consternation. There was a look in his eyes, and a pallor about his face, the housekeeper had never seen there before. She was almost afraid the doctor had gone mad. Manton saw it. "Do not be frightened at my manner, it is only what I fear which makes me like this. I assure you I am perfectly rational, but I know"—he laid great stress on the two words—"that there is a terrible conspiracy going on to do evil to this lady, whom we have all learnt to love."

"Love!" Ah, how he loved her with a passionate intensity which spoke in his every accent!

"Who told you, sir, that the gentleman who was knocked down came into this room?" Mrs. Dundas asked.

"The footman, John. The sham patient had given the man a sovereign, or assuredly he would have made him give an explanation of his extraordinary conduct. It will be a dear present to him, for it will lose him his place."

"I think you are quite right, sir. Had we not better have one of the men up with a crowbar and break the door open?"

"No, let us go round and try the window first. I did not care to go that way before. If that is fastened it can be broken open much more easily."

They went round accordingly. The window was hasped, but a vigorous push of the doctor's shoulders sent the catch flying. He lifted the blind for Mrs.

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Dundas and himself, and they entered together. The bedroom was pitch-dark. Mrs. Dundas had a matchbox in her pocket. She struck a light, and while it burned they glanced round the room. As far as they could see, at the first cursory inspection, the room was empty as regards human occupation. Certainly there was no one lying on the bed—the first place they looked at.

“The young lady is not in either of her rooms!” Mrs. Dundas exclaimed. “I wonder what on earth can have become of her?”

Dr. Manton found the knob of the electric light and turned it up. Then he and the housekeeper between them searched every possible hiding-place in the room. Milly was not to be found. What could have become of her? Had she penned the warning the doctor had found on the writing-table of his private room, and then departed of her own accord? or had she been forcibly carried off without any one in the house being the wiser? Neither solution seemed within the range of probability; but Manton had confessedly arrived at a stage, when solutions had to be sought in the regions of the improbable. Alec felt sure that Milly was not hidden anywhere in the two houses. He was sure she had gone away, and, of the two solutions, he leant to the opinion that she had been forcibly abducted. It was a conclusion he hated and dreaded to come to, yet the other was anything but soothing to his amour-propre, viz. that the girl had left of her own free will without any other adieu than the cryptic

A Fresh Search

message on his desk might convey—a vague warning and nothing more. Out of one wing of a wardrobe Mrs. Dundas produced two things which served to add to the mystery.

They were the hat and cape Milly had been wearing, on that night in Cursitor Avenue, when the attack was made upon her. She had apparently taken all her other small belongings, with the exception of the things Mrs. Dundas had procured to meet her immediate requirements, after she had been brought to the hospital. These were left behind in orderly fashion. They did not actually belong to the girl, and it was not a matter for surprise that she had decided to leave them; but the hat and cape were in a different category. She could hardly go out into the street without them, and they certainly belonged to her. Why then were they left in the wardrobe, where they had hung ever since she came to Alvers Street? The more Manton thought about it the more puzzled he became. He retried the whole matter in the tribunal of his own mind. Could Milly really have departed? Was she somewhere near him still?

XVIII

A DISCOVERY

THE next thing to do was to make a most careful inquisition of the household, and to search both houses from top to bottom. The first part of the programme elicited nothing. The time for the flitting had been admirably chosen, both as regards the man who had ostensibly been knocked down, and the girl for whom they were looking. It was the supper-hour of the staff, when, except in special cases, nurses and servants were to a great extent off duty. Only the footman, John Mandell, had actually seen the stranger moving about the house, although the nurse in charge of the patient had allowed him to leave his room, on the pretext that he had thoroughly recovered, and would see the doctor before leaving. Manton had the best reasons for suspecting that, here again, a liberal *douceur* had oiled the wheels of the machinery worked by this wily visitor ; but this was stoutly denied and impossible to prove. No one had any idea that Milly was not in her bedroom. The housemaid who had brought up her supper on a tray, and set it down on the sitting-room table, said that she heard her, or at any rate some one, moving about in the bedchamber adjoining ; that she knocked at the door to say that

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she had brought up supper, and believed, but was not quite sure, that there was a response. She had not paid special attention, and could not be certain the young lady had acknowledged her announcement. Nothing more could be got out of John Mandell. He had told all he knew in the first instance. Alec Manton was baffled. The nurses and servants could not help him further. There remained only the police outside to be questioned; but after their unavailing efforts to catch the outside loiterer or loiterers, the man or men who had twice concealed themselves in the enclosure opposite the houses, Alec had grave doubts whether he should get anything satisfactory out of them. The fact that this shrubbery, with its somewhat thick undergrowth, ran so close to the surgery and hospital was a prime factor in the whole matter. It was an ideal place for concealment. It was an immense assistance to any one wishing to get away unperceived.

Before questioning the police, the doctor ordered a thorough search of every crevice and corner, every wardrobe and cupboard in the house. The extraordinary fact that the only two patients who happened to be at that time in the hospital had mysteriously disappeared, if not together, at any rate within a very short space of time of one another, without the identity of either being known, or any address being left behind by which they could be traced, acted as a stimulus to all the staff and servants to institute a vigorous investigation.

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They were all turned into amateur detectives, as keen after the least trace of scent as any foxhounds.

Only one discovery was made, and that almost immediately. The bedroom occupied by the nurses was just over the suite which had been assigned to Milly, during her stay at the hospital. It was divided into cubicles, each provided, amongst other furniture, with a hanging wardrobe. The nurse, Mary Sanson, who occupied the cubicle next the door, came in an excited state to the doctor and Mrs. Dundas, who were conferring in the sanctum of the former. Sanson began her statement almost before she got into the room.

“If you please, sir, my out-of-door bonnet and cloak are missing. I can’t find them anywhere, and I’ve searched high and low.”

“You are sure of this, Sanson?” Dr. Manton inquired eagerly. “Where were they when you last saw them?”

“I hung them up only this afternoon, sir, when I came back from my walk with Nurse Downton. She was with me and saw me do it, and can swear to it as well as I can.” Sanson evidently was under the impression that she was in a court of justice, with the doctor as the judge.

This out-of-doors bonnet, of which she spoke, was the uniform enjoined upon all the nurses when attending upon cases outside the hospital, or taking that daily exercise upon which the doctor insisted. It was a blue, close-fitting bonnet, and long cloak of the same colour. Having heard all she had got

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to say Alec dismissed Sanson, having assured her she was not to blame in any way.

"That accounts," he remarked to Mrs. Dundas, "for the young lady leaving her own hat and cape behind her. She had found an excellent substitute. It will also make it more difficult to trace her departure by questioning the police, as they would take very little notice of one of the nurses coming or going."

"Besides," Mrs. Dundas added, "the police are looking for a man, and would scarcely take stock of a woman under the circumstances. Perhaps they may be able to tell us something of the accident case. He, at any rate, could not have disguised himself as one of the nurses."

"No," Alec replied; "but his time was shrewdly chosen, for he followed the patients who had been here to consult me and by *the same door*. At any rate I feel perfectly convinced now that the two did not go off together. Miss Milly ran upstairs to get that bonnet and cloak. I feel perfectly certain from stray hints she has dropped that she intended to leave here without warning, and had no doubt planned it all out beforehand; but I do not believe she intended to do so to-day. I am sure she meant first to have seen her friend Mrs. Aitchison; but the coming of this strange man frightened her into immediate action. I take it that she was attracted to the window by the noise of the crowd, and saw the "accident" carried in by the police. Miss Milly must have recognized him, although, of course, we

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did not. She gathered that some scheme was on foot to carry her off, and determined to be beforehand with them. Hence this warning to me"—Manton had shown the paper previously to Mrs. Dundas—"and her hurried departure during the quietest hour of the day."

Mrs. Dundas had been listening most attentively.

"I believe you are right, sir ; but I dread to think of the young lady out there somewhere, with no one to help her or stand by her, and such powerful and unscrupulous people after her. It quite upsets me." Mrs. Dundas had to pass her handkerchief over her eyes at the picture she had mentally conjured up.

Dr. Manton banged his fist down heavily on the table. "Why didn't she trust in me? Why didn't she confide in me? I would have saved her and guarded her. Now I *swear* I will find her wherever she is, and she shall learn what it is to have a strong arm about her, aye, if she will, to our lives' end."

Hardly were the words out of his mouth than they heard a commotion in the passage, and excited voices. Alec ran to the door and flung it open. In the hall was the chauffeur leaning on the arm of a policeman. His face was cut about and plastered in several places, and his right arm was in a sling.

XIX

BAD NEWS

“When sorrows come, they come not single spies,
But in battalions.”

SOME such words as these, which head this chapter, might well have sprung into the mind of Alec Manton. He felt that the appearance of his chauffeur pointed to some fresh complication of trouble, some real accident, not a fake this time. The doctor braced his mental forces to meet this new anxiety, when already surely he had enough.

“What is it, Penrose? Come in here and tell me, man, what has happened now!” Manton spoke with nervous sharpness, not out of unkindness and lack of sympathy, but simply because his brain and tongue had almost passed the boundaries of his control. The policeman helped the chauffeur to enter the room, and then took up the parable for him, after he had assisted him to a chair.

“It’s this way, sir, begging your pardon, this man was driving your motor, and when he got to the rather steep bit of a hill close to Maldon Street, where Dr. Farner lives, he put on the brake for the first time after leaving this house. I was standing on one side of the road on the kerb near the bottom of the hill; I saw directly, sir, that something was up. The driver here seemed to have lost control

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of the speed, and the machine dashed down the hill—you know, Doctor, it's only a very short one—and crashed into the house wall at the foot."

"Good God!" Manton cried. He had turned quite white. "You don't say so. Penrose is here, but my friend, Mr. Lysergh—is he hurt? He's not killed?" Manton's note had risen in intensity. He had come close to the policeman, stolidly telling his story, as if he would wring the truth out of him.

"No, sir; at least, I hope not, but he's very badly hurt. We took him straight in a cab to the hospital—Guy's."

Manton felt for a chair, and sat down in it heavily, like a man dazed. Mrs. Dundas went and stood by his side. She was an old and faithful servant of the doctor, and had a great affection for him. She realized what this blow must be coming so immediately on top of the other—the loss of the girl he loved.

"Go on," Dr. Manton directed in hoarse tones, very unlike his natural ones, "tell me all about it."

"Well, sir, there's not much to tell, although it was a sight to see, sure enough. I've had to do with a many accidents, horses, carriages, buses, aye, and one or two bicycles and motors; but I never saw one quite as bad as this. The victoria turned right over. The driver here, sir, was shot out against the wall, and when I picked him up was covered with blood, and that mazed he did not know what had happened or where he was. We took him to

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Doctor Farner's surgery, and there he was bandaged up. His right arm is badly sprained, but no bones are broken. The doctor went himself to Guy's with the gentleman who was injured, while he sent me back in his brougham to tell you about it, and to say that he thought the driver would be best in your hospital for a bit, sir."

"You will see to him, Mrs. Dundas, while I go to Guy's. I must be off at once; I cannot bear to think of my friend lying there, dying perhaps, and I not by his side to speak to him, and hear him speak to me."

"I hope, sir, it is not as bad as that. Doctor Farner told me to tell you he thought the gentleman would get over it in time. He lay right under the motor, and three men had to lift it up before they could get him out."

"It is terrible!" Manton exclaimed. "And to think the journey was not necessary, that the man was shamming hurt all the time. I will be even with them all yet. But now I must be off at once. Mrs. Dundas, you will see that the policeman has some refreshment, as well as taking care of Penrose."

The latter now found his power of speech. "It was not my fault, sir, no more than the affair this afternoon; seems terrible strange both should have come the very same day. The fact is, sir, the nut which secures the brake was gone. Some one had taken it out, I expect, when I left the motor in the road and came to tell you, sir, about what had happened when the gentleman was knocked down."

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Manton's face grew very stern and set.

"Do you mean to say, Penrose—speak out, man, and don't make any mistake—that the motor had been intentionally tampered with, that some one had taken away the nut, which keeps the brake in its position and gives it its grip?"

"That's about it, sir. I don't know whether any harm was meant; might have been some urchin's foolishness; all I know is the nut was there, well screwed in, for I tried it before we started out after lunch to-day, and it was not there when I began to go down hill, just before I lost control over the motor. Directly I felt it was missing I cried out to Mr. Lysergh, for I knew it was all up with us, and I felt sure we should both be killed."

The chauffeur was evidently about to break down, so Manton motioned that he should be taken away. Mrs. Dundas and one of the servants helped Penrose out of the room. The policeman remained. When Manton was alone with him the former said—

"This is a bad business, a terribly bad business. This accident was, I feel sure, deliberately planned. I should certainly have been the victim had it not been that my friend offered to go to Doctor Farner for me. I was to be got out of the way at any cost."

"It certainly seems like it," the policeman admitted. "I know there are plenty of men in London, black-hearted enough to plan such a business, and ugly enough to carry it out. You will have to be careful, sir, if they've anything to gain by putting you out of the way. Seems to me they

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ain't even afraid of swinging—for that is what it will come to in the long run, if they don't mend their ways."

Manton did not reply, his brain was in a whirl. Walking like a man in his sleep, he went out into the hall and picked up his hat and gloves. There was a station only five minutes' walk from the surgery; he would go to that and take first train to London Bridge. The motor had been wrecked by design. His dearest friend was lying at Guy's dangerously hurt. The blow had been aimed at himself. For the second time that day his life had been almost miraculously preserved. Lysergh was the victim. Then his brain wandered back to the latter's dream, which was the beginning of all things, as it seemed. It was after hearing the dream that he was telephoned for to Cursitor Avenue; there he had seen the girl and the man in the road. From that moment he had been carried on by a resistless tide, half mystery, half tragedy; now the girl he had learnt to love more than his own life had disappeared as unexpectedly as she had come, and Lysergh lay between life and death in a ward at Guy's.

Using a great effort of will-power, Dr. Manton compelled himself to question the policeman on point duty outside the surgery, as to those who had come in and out during the evening. As he fully expected, the constable could give him no information of a satisfactory character. He had been set to notice especially a dark man with a slight halt in his walk. That was the point upon which

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his observing senses were fixed. In the second place he was less likely to notice some one going out of the house than he was some one going in, as the latter would naturally be known to the servants. Now, as Manton was aware, no two persons were less likely to be especially noticed than those he was in search of. The tall stranger had left when the ordinary patients were filing out of the surgery, and would, of course, pass as one of them. The girl, he felt sure, had watched her opportunity to leave unobserved, in the guise of a nurse. As there were two front doors, one to the house proper and the other to the hospital, and two side doors with the word "tradesmen" printed on them in white letters, there was no lack of means of egress.

In no enviable frame of mind—baffled, worried, terribly anxious on both counts, the disappearance of Milly and the dangerous accident to his friend—Alec bought a first-class return for London Bridge.

XX

DR. MANTON APPEALS TO MRS. AITCHISON

IT was a fortunate circumstance as regards Dr. Manton's practice, that his partner, Maurice Farner, had returned by this time, full of renewed strength and energy to carry on his duties. Dr. Manton was not dependent on his professional income; at the same time it would have been a cause of great annoyance, and regret to him afterwards, had he felt that the absorbing interest in which he was now involved, had wrecked the extensive connection he had laboriously put together.

During the days that followed the accident to Lysergh and the departure of Milly, Alec had the greatest difficulty in doing even a small share of the joint work of the firm. Dr. Farner saw this at once, and realized that the matter was beyond his partner's control. Without making any fuss, or emphasizing it in any way, he quietly relieved Manton of all but a few cases, with which the latter was able to deal without undue strain. Dr. Farner had a great personal liking for his senior partner, and this helped to smooth matters over not a little during that trying time.

Manton was by no means idle, in fact in another

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direction he was full of the most restless energy. He concentrated all the energies of his mind on the determined quest he had undertaken. He pursued it actively by day, and he planned it out during the restless hours of the hot, short nights, when he tossed about on his bed. Sleep had deserted him altogether, except at rare intervals when exhausted nature overcame him for a few brief moments. This happened sometimes in the afternoon, when Manton flung himself on a sofa in the snuggerly and yielded himself to the demand of nature. He always dreaded now going back to the house. He never entered the home-hospital, Dr. Farner attending to the patients who were admitted after the girl's departure. The whole place spoke to Manton of her presence, and of the loss he had sustained. Short as had been her sojourn, her personality was stamped on the building. He lived over again the time when he had found her in a trance at the entrance of the library, and had borne her back again to her own suite of apartments. No love of years could have been more absorbing than this one which Manton felt after only such a brief space of association. It said much for the doctor's physical strength and powers of endurance that he did not show more obvious signs in his face of the strain which both body and mind alike were enduring, at this period.

Alec, when he went to Guy's, and had mounted the long flight of stone steps, which led to the ward in which his friend was lying between life and death,

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endured more in a few seconds than he had ever done in his whole lifetime before. He found Lysergh conscious of nothing, visibly at the lowest point of vitality, evidently at the very ebb of his feeble existence. Lord Caston had been summoned from his Yorkshire residence to the bedside of his second son, but had not yet arrived. The sister in charge of the ward, when she knew who the visitor was, sent for the house-surgeon, Mr. Parker. The latter knew Manton slightly, and had a high opinion of his professional skill.

“What do you think of the patient?” Manton inquired, anxiously awaiting the verdict.

“We cannot tell how it will go with him. He is in the best of hands, those of Sir Dennyson Mayne, who is giving all his attention to the case. With a stronger physique we should hope for the best results, but Mr. Lysergh is terribly handicapped in the fight he will have to make for life and recovery. He is a bad subject for such a strain, and the accident has consequently tried him to the very utmost.”

“You do not give up hope?” Manton inquired, his lip trembling.

“Oh, no, I certainly think the balance is slightly in favour of Mr. Lysergh’s recovery. It is one of those cases that sometimes collapse almost without warning; but if his physical powers can assist us at all, and we tide over the next two or three days, Doctor Mayne thinks that he will be able to pull him through.”

Mr. Parker went away on his other duties. Dr.

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Manton sat by his friend's side, and thought sadly of what had brought him to this pass, of the faithful, self-sacrificing love Lysergh had displayed in his, Manton's, time of need. Now they were shut out from one another by that curious wall of insensibility, against which his forces had already flung themselves in the case of his own patient, Milly.

Of all the barriers which separate man from his fellow-man there is nothing quite like this one of insensibility. It most nearly approaches, of course, that final separation of all, only with this difference, that in death there is no sense of nearness, the spirit has fled we know not where ; at any rate, it no longer inhabits the body. But in insensibility the faculties are there, only shut in and chained, incapable of being stimulated to action or response.

Manton felt then, as thousands of able men of his own profession have done before and since, how stringent are the limitations which hamper the science of medicine. Much as we know of the functions of the brain, of the heart, of the nerves, there is infinitely more that we do not know, cannot estimate, are unable to control. Nature sometimes seems to wish to prove to us that she has mysteries beyond our unravelling, secrets too deep for our successful investigation.

Lysergh, lying close to Manton, so that he could touch him by stretching out his hand, was yet far away beyond the reach of his voice, insensible to his call, however appealingly uttered. What brings about this condition of affairs, why it arises, and

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why it disappears, not the most skilled physician in the world can say with certainty. He can guess approximately at the causes leading up to it, but the actual condition defies explanation.

During the next few days Manton spent as much time as he possibly could by his friend's bedside. There was little or no change apparently, although the very fact that no collapse had actually occurred was in the patient's favour, so that every hour of life made the chances of recovery greater. Manton had to be content with knowing this, although he himself could detect no improvement.

In the meantime one or two things had happened which caused him considerable disturbance. On the day but one following upon Milly's secret departure from the home-hospital, Dr. Manton received an envelope, unregistered, bearing the London post-mark N.W., containing ten ten-pound notes. Inside the envelope was a single sheet of note-paper bearing neither address nor date. On the paper were written the words : " Milly sends the enclosed to Dr. Manton as a small token of deep gratitude for the great care and attention bestowed upon her. She thanks him at the same time for having intervened on her behalf. She implores him not to make any attempts to discover her identity or present place of abode. She assures him that to do so would only cause her great anxiety, and perhaps even bring about actual danger to herself as well as to him. Will Dr. Manton rest assured of the gratitude which nothing can weaken or destroy."

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By the first parcel-post of the same morning Mrs. Dundas received back the nurse's bonnet and cloak, which had been borrowed as a disguise on that eventful night. This packet had also been posted somewhere in the north of London.

Alec was deeply distressed by this note and its contents. Payment on such a liberal scale, in fact payment of any kind, seemed to place the whole transaction on the ordinary professional basis of a doctor and his patient. This was exactly a relationship which Manton had striven to banish from his thoughts. Yet he confessed to himself that the girl could hardly have done otherwise, possessing, as she evidently did, very considerable means, than offer some pecuniary return for the skill which had been expended in bringing her back to health. She had undoubtedly been placed in a dilemma, and had got out of it to the best of her judgment and ability. The doctor did not keep this hundred pounds, which had come to him much against his will, in his own possession. He handed it over to Constable Downie, as compensation for all that he had suffered, in connection with the affair which had brought them together. Downie was by this time on the high road to convalescence, and was quite prepared to run the risk again with the prospect of a similar reward. Those ten ten-pound notes meant a great deal to the constable and his wife.

One of Manton's first visits was, of course, to Mrs. Aitchison, at the private hotel in which she was staying.

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He was shown into the sitting-room almost immediately. Mrs. Aitchison sat writing at the table, and at once rose to greet him.

"I know what you have come to tell me, Doctor."

Manton looked at her with some surprise.

"I had a telegram from your late patient a quarter of an hour ago." As she spoke she took up the flimsy yellow paper from the table, but did not hand it to him.

"What does she say?" he asked anxiously.

Mrs. Aitchison hesitated for a moment as if doubtful of her answer. "I do not see why I should not read it to you," she said, half *sotto voce*, but just loud enough for the doctor to catch the words. "This is the telegram: 'Have left Alvers Street. Will let you know when to rejoin me—Milly.'"

"The address is the most important point," Manton remarked.

"There is practically none, only a post office in London."

"Mrs. Aitchison," Manton urged, "I make an appeal to you, even more urgently than I did before, to help me in the task I have undertaken."

"You mean you want to find your late patient?"

"Yes, I do mean that."

"Then you can expect no assistance from me, Doctor Manton."

Mrs. Aitchison spoke more firmly than any one would have thought possible, seeing her weak and irresolute chin.

Dr. Manton paced the room in silence, wondering

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how he could shake this woman's determination. He was stirred by anger, and yet knew that to a great extent Mrs. Aitchison had right on her side. At last he stopped before her. She had sat down again in the chair she was occupying when he arrived.

"I want you to understand," Manton said, using great control over himself to speak quietly, "that this is not a matter of curiosity on my part. All my life and happiness are involved; I am no youth, lightly stirred and easily changed and discouraged, but a man in his maturity, determined, and immovable. I love with all the depth of my being this girl whom Providence has brought into my life. If she is in danger all the more reason I should be by her side. She needs a strong arm to protect her, and my deep love for her gives me the right to afford that protection. Mrs. Aitchison, I appeal to you with the strongest possible entreaty that you will help me in this matter. I am sure that you have information at your disposal that will lead me at once to the clue I am in search of——"

"I do not deny that," she interrupted.

"Then give it to me, I implore you." Manton would like to have taken the lady and shaken her, she was so stolidly immovable.

"I have given you my answer," she said, "and you make a great mistake, Doctor, if you think you can move me from that position by a hair's breadth. I give you my word that I do not know, as you evidently think I do, where Milly is; but if I did I should certainly not give you the slightest hint

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or the slightest clue. The secret is not mine, but hers. I have no right to give it away, and if I had I should think it perfectly culpable to do so."

Dr. Manton was at his wits' end. This woman's immobility was like a dead wall, against which he flung himself without producing the slightest effect. At last he determined to appeal to her feelings and sympathy.

"Mrs. Aitchison," he urged, "I do not think that you quite realize how much this matter means to me. You very naturally measure my knowledge of, and feeling for, this young lady, who is in a sense your ward, by the space of time during which we have been brought into association. I can only assure you that it is an altogether false system of calculation. Moments become days, and days become years, at a certain crisis of our lives; I have been passing, and am passing, through just such a crisis. The general experience of men with regard to the other sex has not been mine. I have arrived at more than the usual age without my heart having ever gone out to meet its mate. I have been reserved, I fully believe, for the one true and abiding love of my life. Now I see all my hopes dashed to the ground. I am left uncertain of the very name of the woman I love with all my heart. I cannot tell what fate may be impending over her; I cannot stir a muscle to render her the slightest assistance. I assure you, Mrs. Aitchison, that I have neither eaten nor slept since this girl left the shelter of my roof."

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The woman he was addressing showed signs in her face, that she felt the force of the eloquent appeal which was being made to her.

"Forgive me, Doctor Manton, if I seem to fail in sympathy towards you. No one could listen to your tones, as well as your words, without knowing that you are fully in earnest. At the same time I know circumstances which debar me from even telling you as much as I might. I cannot divulge what they are, and the point which interests you most at the present time, namely, the actual spot where my ward, as you call her—really, I am only her companion—is, I know no more than you do."

"Supposing that you hear from Miss Milly, as her telegram suggests, will you not communicate it to me?"

Mrs. Aitchison hesitated for a moment. Then she replied—

"I can only promise you one thing."

"Yes!" Dr. Manton interjected eagerly.

"That I will at once ask leave to communicate with you."

Alec's face fell; he was so sure it would not be given.

"That is equivalent," he said, "to refusing me."

"I am afraid it is," Mrs. Aitchison asserted, "but it is the most I can do. At any rate, it shifts the responsibility from my shoulders. There is one thing to be remembered, Doctor Manton," his *vis-à-vis* looked at him with more shrewdness than he perhaps had given her credit for. "You have

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avowed your own feelings towards this young lady, but you have told me nothing as to any corresponding affection on her part towards you. Has she given you any reason for thinking, that she regards you as more than the doctor who has attended her in a dangerous illness? Surely that is a very different thing from the deeper matter which you have learnt to feel for her?"

Manton felt himself grow pale. Inadvertently Mrs. Aitchison had touched upon the most sore place in his wounded feelings; the remembrance of those crisp ten ten-pound notes came back upon him with telling force. Milly had treated him just as a doctor. She had paid his fees! Save the mark.

"No, Mrs. Aitchison," Alec admitted sadly, "I have no proofs that she feels for me what I feel for her."

Dr. Manton saw that the interview was over. As he was leaving the room he said: "I may rely upon it, that you will at any rate do what you promised?"

"Yes, but do not build upon it, for I know what the answer will be."

The doctor went out of the private hotel, his hat in his hand; he had forgotten to put it on his head. He even walked some yards down the street in this way, until the notice of passers-by arrested his attention; then he remembered that he was bare-headed. This little circumstance, trivial in itself, proved to him the absorption of his mental condition. A great restlessness was upon him. He had

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intended going back from Victoria, but the idea of being shut up in a slow train—there were no fast ones at this period of the day—drove him wild. Instead he turned in the direction of Westminster, and found himself at length, almost without intending it, on the Embankment. Manton went and stood by the low parapet abutting on the river, and looked out. Steamers were plying near at hand, filled with gay people, evidently bent upon some pleasurable excursion. In the middle of the river was a string of barges, each with its man, or two, on board, towed by a steam tug ; beyond, were the warehouses and other buildings which flanked the river on the southern shore. A woman, slatternly, down at heel, with a baby in her arms, begged of him. Mechanically he gave her some silver, for which she thanked him profusely. He saw all these things like a man in a trance ; they affected him not at all, any more than a picture would in a shop he might pass in the street. It seemed hardly possible that he was the same Dr. Manton, sane, vigorous, well-balanced, healthy in body and mind, that had driven out in his motor to see the patient in Cursitor Avenue only so short a time previously.

He stretched out his arms towards the sky and drew in a deep breath. Something must be done or he would assuredly go mad. The uncertainty and suspense, the positive fear for Milly's safety which overwhelmed him, was driving him frantic. What could he do ? Then the thought of Inspector Jacob flashed across his mind. He had heard so

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much of that officer's great sagacity in his profession. Was it not possible that he might find a clue, and eventually solve the mystery which enveloped him ?

Dr. Manton faced round in the direction of Charing Cross underground station. His intention was to call a hansom, if he met one, and drive to Bow Street. Failing that he would cover the short distance as quickly as he could on foot. He did not expect to find the inspector at the head-quarters of the police courts, but doubtless the officials there would be able to give him instructions, in what way he could communicate with the detective officer.

Directly Alec turned he saw an empty hansom approaching him, and hurried towards it, holding up his hand with a view to arresting the attention of the driver. He was, however, too late ; some one else, who had apparently been leaning over the parapet of the Embankment, signalled to the cab-driver, before the latter saw Manton's uplifted hand. The doctor was chagrined at just missing what, at that moment, he so ardently desired. Hansoms on the look out for fares are not by any means plentiful on the Embankment. Dr. Manton's disappointment made him take more notice of this particular incident than he otherwise would have done ; he was close enough to note every detail. The man who had chartered the hansom in the nick of time was young, and dressed in the height of fashion. He evidently had some difficulty in mounting the step of the vehicle, and as he did so a racking cough rent the air. For a

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moment it seemed as if he would fall backwards, but by some effort of the will he accomplished his purpose, and settling down on the seat closed the lower doors.

In spite of his preoccupation the doctor's professional instinct was aroused. The peculiar hacking nature of the cough, which had almost amounted to a paroxysm, told its tale clearly enough to an ear capable of interpreting it. This young man, just across the threshold of manhood, and evidently belonging to the upper classes, was undoubtedly in the last stage of phthisis ; he certainly ought not to have been abroad in his condition of weakness, above all he ought not to have been by himself ; a condition of faintness might supervene at any moment. All this, passing through Alec's mind, diverted his thoughts for the time being from the central absorbing interest which dominated him. He felt anxious to render assistance, and even went as far as stepping forward to offer his services. The hansom was standing still, while the driver held the trap-door open to ascertain to what address his new fare wished to be driven. The cough, which still mastered the young man, prevented him from giving the direction for some seconds. The horse was moving uneasily, expecting every moment to be loosed like an arrow from the bow. The driver, seeing Manton come up, was uncertain whether he was a friend of his fare, and looked at the doctor for some indication. The face of the invalid was partly covered by a handker-

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chief, which he was holding to his mouth. Suddenly the young man dropped this—it was covered with blood. He rasped out: "Drive to Guy's Hospital as quickly as possible."

Hearing this direction Dr. Manton felt that he could do nothing; a speedy horse, like the one between the shafts, ought to be at Guy's in about ten minutes. The young man would be certainly better there if the authorities could take him in.

Alec stepped back, nodding to the driver to do what he was told.

At this moment for the first time Alec caught a full view of the young man's face, as he sat back in the hansom, exhausted by his fit of coughing and the fatigue of giving the necessary instructions to the driver.

Manton was startled, and stood without movement, like one turned to stone in the road. The face so ghastly, so emaciated, was yet like another that he had seen, and which was engraved for ever upon his heart. The young man bore the closest resemblance to the lost Milly. So remarkable was the likeness that it made all the blood in Manton's body tingle. Either it was the most extraordinary coincidence in the world, or else his imagination was playing him false.

The hansom drove away at a rapid pace. A motor coming along hooted to the doctor to get out of the way, and had to slow up because he neglected to take the hint. The driver used some fairly expressive language, to indicate his disgust at Manton's stupidity.

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"If I had not been coming along slowly I must have knocked you down, sir. The high road is not the right place to stand star-gazing in the day-time."

Manton took no notice, nor did he offer any reply. His mind was in too great a whirl to be able to frame one. He realized just sufficiently to know, and recognize, that the chauffeur was in the right and he in the wrong.

Alec stepped back on to the pavement ; the motor went on, the driver no doubt thinking that he had very nearly run over a lunatic.

For a few minutes the doctor stood quite still, trying to recover his usual mental balance. No doubt he had made a mistake. His obsession had caused him to see a resemblance which existed only in his imagination, and not in actual fact.

XXI

A CONFERENCE AND A COINCIDENCE

DR. MANTON'S meditations were interrupted by the coming up of a policeman, who had been watching his movements for some time with not a little suspicion. Perhaps, like the driver of the motor, he imagined that Alec was not in his right mind. The tide was high, and suicide from the Embankment, by people throwing themselves into the river, was not infrequent. This particular constable had intervened more than once in a similar case; he fancied that his opportunity of distinguishing himself had come again. The great difficulty in arriving at such a conclusion consisted in the fact that Manton seemed more interested in the road than he did in the water. The constable consequently approached him diplomatically.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but have you lost anything?"

What the policeman thought he had lost was his wits, but he did not at present feel that there was sufficient evidence to make him say so.

Manton saw that the constable eyed him strangely. He wanted to go to Bow Street, but not in custody, as a person incapable of managing his own affairs, so he pulled himself together with a strong effort of the will.

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"Thank you," he replied, "I wanted to call the hansom which has just driven off, but some one was before me. He was evidently in the last stage of consumption. I am a doctor, and should have liked to have rendered assistance if possible. Curiously enough, the fare, whom I did not know, bore the very closest resemblance, or at any rate I fancied he did, to some one for whom I am looking."

"Were you looking for him on the Embankment, sir?"

"It is a young lady. No, I was about to drive to Bow Street to get the address of Inspector Jacob of the detective force. I intend to place matters in his hands."

"I don't fancy he will take it up, sir, unless there is some crime attached to it, and he has instructions to do so from head-quarters. You see, sir, it is not like a private detective, where you pay your money and he does what you tell him. The inspector is a public officer."

"I know that," Manton replied testily. "The affair I am speaking of is in the hands of the police. Serjeant Skinner told me that Mr. Jacob was about to have it in hand."

"Oh, that's a different matter. I beg your pardon, sir, for offering my remarks, I hope you will not take it amiss. The inspector is a very clever man; I am sure you could not put the matter into better hands. He is generally to be found in number 4 room, Outer Temple; at any rate

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they will tell you there where to communicate with him."

"Where is the Outer Temple?" Dr. Manton asked.

"Right opposite the Law Courts, sir. You can walk there from here in five or six minutes. When you come to the Temple Station turn up Arundel Street."

"I know, along the Strand. Thank you."

The constable touched his hat. Manton hurried away in the direction indicated. He was glad of the quick motion which helped to dispel the impression which noting a likeness to Milly had made upon his mind.

Manton was fortunate in finding the inspector within. He was dictating a report to his superiors on a typewriter, when the doctor was announced. Manton had sent in his card by an office boy.

"I know the errand you have come upon, sir, and was about to communicate with you. I am very glad you have called. If you will kindly step into the other room"—Jacob indicated an inner door with a wave of his hand—"I will be with you in a couple of minutes; I must just finish off this report, which is of great importance, then I am quite at your service."

Manton did as he was directed. Jacob struck him favourably. He was certainly not a handsome man, his head being out of proportion to his narrow chest and long arms, it was much too big, but the swelling forehead and small but piercing eyes be-

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trayed both power and intelligence. This was a man who had evidently been intended by nature for the course of life he was now pursuing. Manton felt confidence in him directly, and could understand the great reputation he had achieved in his own profession.

The doctor went into the inner apartment, Jacob himself shutting the door behind him. The room was lined with deed-boxes on all sides, except where the window, which was dingy enough, broke the monotonous line. On a large table, in the centre, were papers in ordered files, arranged and docketed. Only the space in front of the inspector's chair was bare, except for a pad of blotting-paper. The whole room suggested severity, and that its owner was a man of great methodical exactitude. Alec walked to the window and stood looking out. The façade of the Law Courts was right opposite; it was certainly an appropriate place for the office of a detective-inspector. How many stories which had commenced, as it were, in that room had been ended in the buildings opposite. What an intricate web of crime and mystery was suggested by those lines of deed-boxes which surrounded Manton on all sides.

As he was reflecting these things the door opened. Jacob came in; he drew a chair to the table.

"Will you kindly be seated, sir? I am now entirely at your service." The doctor did as he was bidden. The inspector had placed him so that the light from the window should fall upon his face. He was in the habit of gathering almost as much

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from the faces of his witnesses as he was from their words.

At both sides of the table, from the floor to the top, on either hand of the inspector, were rows of drawers. Jacob took a key out of his pocket and unlocked a drawer on the right-hand side. From it he drew a small roll of papers. Glancing at them to satisfy himself that they were what he wanted, he spread them before him.

"These have to do with the matter about which you have come to consult me, Doctor Manton."

"Yours is a world of manuscripts," Manton said, looking at the piles of literary matter on the table before him.

"What you see is nothing compared to the amount you cannot see. All those deed-boxes are full of documents. Half the criminal history of England lies hidden there. It would make sinister matter enough if it were published ; only the more recent police transactions are recorded on this table, and the unfinished cases generally find a place in the drawers on my right-hand side. Your matters are on the top, Doctor Manton, because they are the ones which I have in hand to attend to next. Serjeant Skinner is an intelligent officer ; he has given me a very fair résumé of all the things that have happened from his own point of view, or which he thinks will bear more directly on the case. It certainly is an extraordinary affair, but one which ought not, I fancy, to present insurmountable difficulties as regards elucidation. I understand,

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Doctor Manton, that your interest has been sensibly quickened by the disappearance of this young lady ? ”

“ That is quite true,” Alec assented. “ I am determined now, with your assistance, Inspector, or without it, to find my late patient. I believe her to be in constant peril when away from my protection. I am also just as anxious as ever to bring the men to justice, who have woven about this girl and about myself a web of crime and misery.” Dr. Manton spoke hotly. The cold measured tones of Inspector Jacob were little in accord with his own burning eagerness.

“ I quite understand what you feel, and you may be sure that we on our part—the police, I mean, and myself, as I am in charge of this case—will leave no stone unturned, to bring matters to a satisfactory conclusion. Of course the police look at things from quite a different standpoint from yourself ; they are more interested in catching the criminals and securing their conviction ; you, on the other hand, put the finding of this young lady into the premier position. Fortunately both interests meet ; the one will lead to the other, I take it, in either case. Now I should like to ask you one or two questions. In the first place : you think you could identify the man you saw in the road the night when the attack was first made ? ”

“ Yes, I should know his back and I should recognize his walk.”

“ It was remarkable enough then to attract any

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one's attention ? ” the inspector asked, raising his eyebrows. What he seemed to be thinking was, here was a clue at the very beginning which the police officials ought to have been able to lay hold of.

“ Of course, physical peculiarities attract my eye more than they would the majority of people.”

“ You mean professionally ? ”

“ Yes, it is part of our training.”

“ So it is of ours,” Jacob suggested. “ A policeman, especially one belonging to the detective branch, is not worth his salt unless he can tell you whether the man he has under observation for a full minute turns out his feet more than usual when he walks, or has one eyebrow slightly higher than the other. It is the A B C of his business to note these things, Doctor Manton, still more such a peculiarity as the one you mention—one leg shorter than the other. Now I think,” the inspector went on, rumpling his rather thick hair with his hand, a habit of his when thinking out an intricate problem, “ that the fact of no one having reported such a man being seen, throughout the length and breadth of the British Isles, shows that there was no such man to be seen.”

“ You don't mean,” Dr. Manton interrupted, “ that I am under a delusion ? ”

“ Oh, no, I am convinced that your observation, short as your opportunity was, was quite correct.”

“ Do you imply then that the man is dead ? ” Alec asked in a tone of intense surprise.

“ No, sir, I don't mean that either. I think he

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is simply lying *perdu*; he has not been out, except in some very secluded place, since the night of that attack. If you notice, in looking over the points of the case, no one but yourself has given any evidence with regard to a man disfigured by any deformity. Everything, except that one primary action, has clearly been done by some one else; more than one or two, probably. He is concealed, the main-spring of this watch, while others are doing his bidding. I take it, then, that he has a strong suspicion that you noticed his physical peculiarities; he is well aware, of course, that the police are on the look out for him. No policeman has seen him, for the simple reason that he has taken care none of us should have the opportunity."

Inspector Jacob turned over his papers and refreshed his memory. "I may tell you in confidence, Doctor Manton," he went on after a pause, "that several hundreds of slightly deformed men throughout the length and breadth of the three kingdoms have been under the surveillance of the police. A large percentage of them, especially in the metropolis, have been actually questioned as to their whereabouts on that particular night. The answers have shown in each case that the man we looked for was not the man we found. I only mention this to show to you that the force has been by no means idle, since the affair came into their hands.

Dr. Manton was much struck with this information which the inspector gave in the most ordinary

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everyday tone. It convinced Alec that the police were much more alive than he had imagined. Manton shared the general opinion as regards the force, looking at the matter only from the outside, that they were not sufficiently expert in the investigation side of their duties. He found out by a simple process of intuition that a great deal of matter was pigeon-holed in the archives of the constabulary which was never made public, but which was of the greatest possible use in dealing with the criminal population of the kingdom.

"Thank you, Inspector; what you have told me puts matters in a new light. Do you not think it probable that this particular man for whom you are looking, the centre and brain of the conspiracy, may have left England altogether, leaving the conduct of affairs to subordinates. You see, the very peculiarities of the man make his liability to capture considerably greater. As to the others, we have nothing to go by at all; we are looking for them in the dark, while they can watch us in perfect safety in the broad daylight."

"No, I do not think that the head of the affair has escaped by going abroad. In the first place all the ports were watched immediately. A telegram travels quicker than a train; but, apart from this, I feel sure he does not wish to escape; his purpose has not been accomplished. You frustrated him, Doctor, at the exact moment, probably, when the plans of months had reached their culmination in action. He had managed to get this young lady

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by some pretext or other, with which we are not acquainted, owing to her own reluctance to give us information, into a most secluded corner. His intention was clear—to compel her to go through a form of marriage, to bind her in some way. That purpose was fortunately rendered futile by the remarkable chain of circumstances which brought you to Cursitor Avenue that night——”

“I shall ever thank God for that,” Manton interrupted with vehement emphasis.

“Exactly, it is a matter of the greatest congratulation. In a few hours no intervention would have availed anything. However, we have abundant evidence that the original plan still holds good. They were beaten for a time, but they never for a single instant surrendered their original purpose. Hardly was this girl removed to your hospital, Doctor Manton, than they discovered her whereabouts. A cordon of police failed to keep them from the immediate neighbourhood of your house and the hospital adjoining, neither were they afraid to commit a crime in carrying out the object they had in view. Your own life was only saved by a miracle. It is clear then,” the inspector went on, summing it up with quiet emphasis, “that the last chapter of this involved story has not yet been written. It is obvious to my mind that there must be enormous interests at stake. I don’t believe, myself, that love, or infatuation, call it what you will”—the inspector shrugged his shoulders as if that sort of thing was beneath contempt, but still

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had to be taken into consideration—"is the prime factor."

"What do you consider then to be the moving cause?" Manton inquired. He was curious to see whether Jacob's opinion agreed with that of his friend Lysergh, without the former having heard the dictum of the latter.

"I think it is a matter of money. An enormous sum of money, probably, judging by the risks that are being run, with perhaps a little admixture of the sentimental side thrown in, as I am given to understand the victim of this conspiracy is a young lady with very considerable personal attractions."

Jacob glanced shrewdly at his visitor as he said these words.

"That is so," the doctor admitted. "But now, Inspector, you have summed up the past and the general aspects of the position with remarkable skill. Now I want you to come to what interests me most, namely, the future. What is the next step? In other words, what do you propose to do?"

"I think," Jacob said, with those quiet tones of his which carried so much weight, "that the principal, and probably his subordinates also, will be in our hands within the space of a few days, maybe in as many hours."

"Why do you speak so confidently?" Manton inquired. "I confess I fail to feel it, considering that nothing has been found out, hitherto, which helps in the slightest degree."

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"Something has happened which will help us immensely."

"I don't understand you. Pray be more explicit." Manton was visibly vibrating with excitement.

"The escape of this young lady."

"How does that help you? I think it makes matters much worse."

"Do you know when is the best time to catch a spider?" Jacob did not wait for an answer, but went on. "When a fly, especially a very attractive fly—I suppose," he added ironically, "even flies have their degrees of attractiveness—has got itself entangled at the extreme edge of the web; the spider is afraid that the fly may break itself loose; he comes out to make sure that this unfortunate contingency does not take place. That, Doctor Manton, I can assure you from long experience is the exact moment to catch a spider. In other words, to drop the language of metaphor, I believe the caution that has hitherto kept this man, with his deformity, concealed from our observation, will be to a great extent relaxed now that the girl is once more a quarry to be hunted in the open. Either he knows, what you do not know, where she is, in which case he will issue forth to go to that locality—or he has to find her. The imminence of his eagerness will cause him to do something which his better and more sober judgment would condemn in other circumstances."

Manton reflected for two or three minutes in silence on what Inspector Jacob had just said. He

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could not help seeing that there was a great deal of shrewdness, combined with knowledge of the seamy side of human nature, in the detective officer's summing up. After turning matters over in his mind, Alec said, "Then I suppose there is nothing for me to do but wait ; I find it the most trying occupation of all."

"Yes, you must wait, Doctor Manton, and I must act. I can quite understand how irksome you find it, at the same time you may rest assured that no effort on our part will be spared to bring this matter to a successful issue. It must be some consolation to you to know, that I can say without self-praise that I have a record behind me of continual success in all the criminal cases I have had entrusted to me, and some of them have been of a very involved nature. I will report to you at least twice every day, and the moment anything occurs, in which your co-operation would be of the slightest assistance, I will let you know at once. You are on the telephone, of course ? "

"Oh, yes." Manton gave his number and circuit, which the inspector took down.

"It saves looking out," the inspector remarked, "when time is valuable."

The two men shook hands ; the office boy, answering to a touch of an electric bell on the table, showed Dr. Manton out. He went down the stone steps out into the Strand.

By this time Manton was feeling faint from long abstinence of food. Strong as he was, he felt that

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in a few minutes he might turn dizzy. As he passed along the Strand his eye rested on the sign-board of a restaurant into which he had turned years ago for a lunch, on not a few occasions, during his student days. Entering it, he called for sandwiches and a glass of port wine. Consuming these, he turned over in his mind the very important conversation he had just had with Inspector Jacob. It gave him renewed hope, and acted as an antidote to Mrs. Aitchison's refusal to render any assistance and his consequent disappointment.

After Manton had smoked a cigarette and paid his reckoning, he went out again into the street. Then a curious thing happened. There was a block in the traffic, opposite the new Gaiety Theatre. A motor omnibus had skidded; the wheels on one side had mounted the pavement in front of the shops, on the right-hand side. The omnibus was considerably damaged, but fortunately no one was hurt. A large crowd had collected, so that Manton failed to push his way through. He was on the look out for a passing cab to take him back to Victoria. As he stood, with the crowd surging about him, he watched vehicle after vehicle come up, only to add to the throng of those already collected, unable to make their way westward. Suddenly his eye was caught by a horse in a hansom cab, more restive than its fellows; the driver was engaged in overcoming his horse's evident desire to stand on its hind legs. Manton recognized the horse at once, and afterwards the driver. It was

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the same cab which he had nearly secured an hour ago on the Embankment. It was empty, and he made up his mind not to be frustrated on this occasion.

Alec walked briskly to the spot, indicated his intention to the driver, and jumped in, just saying the words, "Victoria Station, Brighton side." By this time the congestion of the traffic had been controlled by the police. The motor omnibus had been removed to one of the side streets leading towards Covent Garden; other omnibuses, and vehicles of all sorts, were on the move once more in both directions.

Without further event Manton reached Victoria. As he got out he handed the driver half a crown, for which the latter was not a little grateful.

"You were the man who took an invalid gentleman a little while ago to Guy's Hospital?"

"Yes, sir. I, too, recognized you again. This has been a good day for me; I should like a lot like it. He gave me half a sovereign—that's truth, he did."

"The poor fellow seemed very ill," Manton remarked. "I am a doctor, and should have liked to have rendered him some assistance; but when I heard the direction he gave you I felt he knew what he was about, and was going to the best place."

"That's true, sir, I don't know what we should do without them hospitals. I 'ave been in one myself twice; once with a broken arm, and another

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with a smashed collar-bone—chucked over the roof of my cab like a acrobat turning a somersault.”

“Were they able to take the gentleman in at Guy’s?”

“Yes, sir. When they saw his card I heard the hall porter say, ‘Bright’s Ward.’ He was pretty bad, not able to stand. I saw they fetched a stretcher to carry him up.”

“Thank you. Good day, driver. I hope I may be your fare again, some time.”

The man touched his hat, and drove away saying, “I hope so, too, sir.”

Manton turned into the station, wondering why it was that this matter interested him so much. It was, of course, only a coincidence that he had been taken to the very same ward in which his friend, Algernon Lysergh, was already lying. The doctor had no doubt that he would hear further particulars of the case from either the nurse or the house-surgeon, when he visited Guy’s a few hours later.

About three-quarters of an hour afterwards Manton reached his own door. Nothing of any interest, as regards the one great object of his thoughts, had transpired since he left home. He found messages from two cases, situated at no great distance, asking him to go to them as soon as possible. Alec had hired a new motor from the garage until his own had been put in a state of repair. He had this brought round at once and paid his visits. Fortunately neither of them, although urgent, pre-

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sented any difficulty. He did what was necessary in the way of prescribing, and then returned home. A great drowsiness came over him, so that he almost slept even in the carriage. The air on his face, as they moved along at a good pace through the less-frequented streets, homewards, completed the effect of the doctor's loss of rest.

He went in, ran upstairs, and flinging himself down on the sofa under the window, was asleep by the time his head touched the cushion. There he remained undisturbed for a couple of hours.

A man-servant came in and went out again, seeing the condition of affairs. It was fortunate indeed for Alec, seeing all that he had to undergo afterwards, that he had secured this refreshing interval of rest.

When he awoke it was seven o'clock, just time to wash, have dinner, and then go for his nightly visit to Guy's.

XXII

AT GUY'S HOSPITAL

MANTON felt like a different man when his motor drew up at the entrance gate of the hospital. His recuperative power was marvellous, no doubt owing to the regular, healthy life he had always lived, and the strong natural physique which he had inherited.

He made his way without question through the gateway, being saluted as he passed by one of the doorkeepers. Students and nurses were passing one another in the open roadway ; flanked by grass on the one side, and the hospital buildings on the other. A few patients were sitting out of doors still ; these were on the high road to full recovery.

Manton mounted the steps with rapid stride. Bright's Ward is at the top of the building, and is reserved for paying patients—men to the right, women to the left. Something seemed to tell Manton that a change had come since he was there in the morning. In addition, there was a thought of that haunting resemblance, which had met him again on his awaking from sleep, between the invalid in the hansom and the girl he had lost. In the passage-way of the ward he met the nurse who waited on Lysergh. On seeing his approach she came to meet him ; her face wore a bright look, which reassured

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him at once. Important news he had expected, but, whether it would be good or bad, Alec had been unable to determine in his own mind.

"You have something to tell me, nurse?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes, Doctor. Your friend has regained consciousness, and his pulse is decidedly stronger; he is taking in nourishment freely, and looking forward to seeing you."

"I am so glad."

This information banished for a moment from Alec's thoughts the other subject he had on his mind, so that he omitted to inquire whether the invalid who had driven up in a hansom had been located in the same ward. Drawing aside the curtain from the cubicle, Manton entered. In Bright's Ward the patients are placed in separate boxes, or cubicles, open at the top, so that the fresh air that comes in at the windows may circulate freely through the building.

Lysergh was lying on his side; his eyes brightened visibly when Alec came in.

"I have been longing for you," he said.

"I am so thankful you are better. You must not excite yourself, or I shall get notice of banishment." Manton sat down on the edge of the bed.

"I won't do that, you may rely upon me. Do you know I feel as if I had come back to the world a different person; not as regards you, Alec, I love you just as I have always done, and perhaps even more; it is as regards myself, that I have changed.

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Do you know I think I have always been very selfish."

"How can you say so?" Manton interrupted.

Lysergh smiled.

"You must not contradict me, Alec. You ought to know it is bad for a sick man to be contradicted; besides, what I said was true. I can see it plainly now. I have just shut myself up into a narrow circle with that ominous word 'ego' not only in the centre of it, but radiating at every point of the circumference. I see now where I have been wrong from the earliest moment I can recollect anything. I am sure it has not made for happiness, either mine or that of other people, especially you, Alec, who have suffered most of all."

"Am I really to let you go on talking such nonsense without putting in a word edgeways?" Manton protested.

"Yes, a sick man is like the Sultan of Turkey, or the Shah of Persia, no one must contradict him on pain of death. Since I came to myself I have been planning all sorts of things; it seems as if my brain had been working all by itself, when I was apparently unconscious, and far removed from the outer world. I have been—I see it all clearly enough now—consistently selfish and irritable; I fancied every one noticed"—he winced a little—"well, you know, the things in which I differ from other people. I was at war with mankind, my nerves were all on the jar. I fancied sneers and slights when none were intended."

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"Some of that is quite true," Manton assented.

"Do you know, the happiest time I have ever had in my life was in the boat. I felt then on a par with other men; I have never felt it at any other time."

"In many respects, Algy, you never have been on a par with other people and never will be, because you are superior to them."

"Now don't flatter me, please. Humility is the best of all disciplines. At any rate, when I get out of this place I mean to go on a new tack; find a mission for myself of some kind. This hospital, for instance, has taught me something. Here are all these men in this ward, and there are all the other wards besides; think how much some one like myself could do in the way of reading to them, cheering them up a bit, bringing them books and papers."

"There is something in what you say," Manton agreed. "You have leisure and means, Algy, and could of course do a good deal."

"I mean to try, anyway." Lysergh lowered his voice. "There was a poor chap brought in a few hours ago and placed in the next cubicle. I was just roused then from my long sleep of unconsciousness; I think I was preternaturally awake; my mind more than usually receptive of what was going on. Although, of course, I could see nothing, I could tell he was terribly ill; his cough, every now and then, was something terrible."

Manton, while his friend had been speaking, had

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suddenly grown doubly attentive. His thoughts had gone back at once to the incident on the Embankment. He felt confident that Lysergh was talking about the very case which had stimulated his interest to such an extraordinary extent. Lysergh went on—

“He has been very silent for some time ; when his cough is troublesome it seems to rack his whole body. I have been questioning the nurse about him. She says it is an awfully sad case. The poor fellow is only about two or three-and-twenty, and cannot possibly last more than a few days at the outside. The worst of it is the doctors say that his illness is due to a great extent to all kinds of dissipation. Yet the nurse tells me that he has the most beautiful face, and a very attractive, winning manner. Why does life seem so complicated ? and why do things get so twisted which might have been straight ? ”

“If we could answer that,” Manton replied, “we should be able to find a remedy, perhaps. I believe that I saw this poor fellow you are talking about before he entered the hospital at all.” The doctor then went on to tell Lysergh all that had happened, since the latter had been rendered unconscious by the accident, which had smashed the motor, and nearly proved fatal to Lysergh himself. The doctor passed as lightly over it as he could, dwelling as little as possible upon his own feeling, lest he should excite his friend, and so do him harm. Lysergh listened with the keenest interest, every

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now and then asking a question to elucidate a point which was not quite clear. Manton wound up by remarking upon the striking resemblance he had noticed, between the invalid in the hansom cab, and his own lost patient at the home-hospital.

The conversation had been carried on in an undertone, as words spoken at all audibly might reach those lying in adjacent beds. When they had reached this point something happened which arrested their attention. They both heard a name spoken in the next cubicle, the one in which the invalid was lying about whom they had been speaking. The stillness of the ward was broken by some one calling out the name "Milly" two or three times.

It seemed an extraordinary occurrence, following upon what had just been said. Lysergh sat up and looked at the doctor; Manton had sprung to his feet. The sudden movement was too much for Algy's weakened frame; he sank back upon the pillows with a gesture of pain, and for a moment seemed likely to sink back into the condition, from which he had roused a few hours previously. Manton was by his side instantly, and, placing his arm under his head, gave him a little water from a glass by his side; then he bathed his forehead with some eau-de-Cologne.

"That is all right," Lysergh said, with a feeble smile. "I am better now. It was stupid of me to try to sit up. I was startled by what I heard."

Since that repeated cry of "Milly" silence had reigned in the ward. There were doubtless

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thousands of Millys scattered throughout the length and breadth of England, probably some hundreds in London alone ; but, as has been said previously, it so happened that Manton had never known any one bearing that name before this, in the course of his experience. Something told him, and in this his friend was absolutely in agreement, that the Milly for whom the dying man was calling in the next box was the Milly Manton was looking for, the Milly Manton loved. The resemblance that he had noticed was accounted for, if this conjecture proved to be correct.

Manton sat down again, uncertain what he should do. Neither of the friends spoke. Manton sat, and Lysergh lay, in breathless expectation, wondering what would happen next. After a distinct interval the name which had electrified them was called once more. Manton could stand it no longer, he sprang again to his feet.

“Here is the clue we have been looking for. I believe God has put it into our hands. I mean to go into the next cubicle.”

Lysergh lay and considered what he should advise.

“Had you not better wait,” he suggested after a minute, “until you can speak to either the house-surgeon or the nurse. It is rather a responsibility to go into another cubicle without the leave of the authorities. Nurse will be back again directly ; she has only gone to have her supper, and afterwards will come with some soup for me.”

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"Supposing she objects, I shall lose my opportunity. A nurse in a hospital is hidebound by all sorts of rules. Of course it is quite right she should be so, but there are exceptions which must override them. I know exactly what would happen; she would want to fetch the house-surgeon, and he would probably insist upon my waiting until to-morrow morning, when it may be too late."

"I don't see quite what you could do, or find out, even if you act as you propose. The nurse told me the young fellow was in a condition of delirium, or at any rate of unconsciousness; he would not have called out like that if he had been in his senses, or knew where he was. How, then, could you obtain information from such a source?"

Manton replied with full assurance in his tone—"I believe he will answer me even if he would not or could not respond to any one else. I have often found it so in the course of my practice, when I have not been personally interested as I am now. I have a sort of mesmeric influence over delirious patients, without using any mesmeric arts. I must go to him. I feel just as if some one were bearing me forwards with power quite beyond any resistance on my part."

Lysergh sank back on to his pillow, and Alec slipped round into the box next door to that of his friend. It was empty, save for the sick man. Manton gave a start directly he saw the patient. He knew that he was right in his surmise. The Milly for whom the call had been made was his

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Milly without a doubt. There was a remarkable resemblance between the poor emaciated invalid before him and the girl with her splendid beauty and queenly physique for whom he was looking—whom he passionately loved. Manton had not the slightest doubt that Milly's brother lay before him, tossing on that bed in Guy's Hospital. It gave him a spasm of feeling. He felt as if a part of his dear one's life was ebbing out before his eyes.

Alec approached the bed and looked down on the sick man's face. Slowly the latter responded, and their eyes met. Neither spoke. Manton was engaged in subduing the turmoil of his own spirit. He was using his will power over his own personal feelings first. If he could not conquer them, he knew he should accomplish nothing with the man he had come to interrogate. Self-conquest must always come before the conquest of others in every field of human life. No man knew this better than Alec Manton. So he exercised to the full that marvellous strength of will, with which nature had endowed him at his birth, and which the years had trained and disciplined. It was an interesting enough scene to the psychologist, had one been present; first the sustained effort to overcome the emotions of the doctor's own, at that moment, turgid personality, then when that was accomplished the struggle to bring lucidity and directness into the confused brain of the dying boy, for he appeared little more under the influence of the throes of that wasting and terrible disorder.

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Manton soothed him by means of three great channels of sympathy, of personal impression—the eye, the voice, and the hand. The doctor's eye secured the shifting gaze and gradually focussed it, his strong, comparatively cool fingers held the other's thin wrist, his voice acted like magic, soothing, bringing order out of chaos.

XXIII

THE NEXT BED

WHAT Manton went through in the process had to be endured for the sake of the object to be achieved. This young man was just like the girl he loved ; it was almost conceivable that it was her hand he held, that it was she who was slipping from him into the grasp of one stronger than he, that great enemy—death !

It was some ten minutes or a quarter of an hour before the process took full effect. During that time Alec could only wait and endure. At last the eye lost its wandering, vacant look. It became at least half intelligent, peevish. The sick man tried to release himself from the doctor's grasp, to push him away from his bedside, from him.

"Go away. I don't know who you are. I don't want you. I want Milly—I want her so badly. Are they keeping her away from me ? "

"I am your friend," Alec said soothingly. What an effort it cost him not to show his impatience ! But he knew it would spoil all, if he attempted to hurry things, and so send this poor soul back into the mazes of delirium. "I am Milly's friend, too. I would do anything for her, and so I would for you —tell me your name."

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"My name ! It seems so long since I have heard it." He sank back upon his pillows and seemed to be trying to think. "My name ! They have called me of late"—he sank his voice lower—"they have it entered here as Gascoigne, Jarvis Gascoigne—only it's not my real name, you know. Jarvis is all right, but Gascoigne, I invented that." He nodded his head sagely, as if it were a very clever thing. The sick man was a strange mixture of confusion and immaturity. Dissipation had first sapped his brain power, and then disease had stepped in to complete what the other had begun.

"I like the name Jarvis," Alec said, "but it would go better with some other name, I fancy, than Gascoigne."

"Jarvis was my father's Christian name. He wanted it given to me. Afterwards he hated me, and left it all, all he could leave—not my mother's, that belonged to me of right—to my sister, to Milly, you know. So I had a big quarrel with him, and I would not carry his name any longer. I called myself Gascoigne—Jarvis Gascoigne, instead of—see ?"

The invalid had broken off before the crucial word which Manton was all on tiptoe, mentally, to hear.

"Don't you ever use the other name, the old name ? Don't you ever sign yourself, for instance, Jasper —— ?" Manton asked.

"I don't sign like I used to"—the young man gave a hideous leer which distorted his face—"it's no use. They won't take my paper. I might sign

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for a thousand pounds, and it would not get me a drink. The beastly Jews! Of course, I used to sign my right name; they knew well enough what it was, and would not take any other."

"Oh, yes, of course," Alec assented; "your new name was no good legally; you had to call yourself by your right one then, at any rate."

"Of course—yes! I did not forget how to write it when there was anything to be made out of it; I wrote it then all right."

At this moment the nurse entered the cubicle. She started in surprise at seeing Dr. Manton, whom, of course, she knew well as the friend of the Hon. Algernon Lysergh. Why had he come into the next box? No one had visited this case before, except members of the hospital staff, professionally. It had gone to the nurse's heart that this boy was dying there without a friend to look after him; no one even to inquire for him.

Manton was not given to swearing, or he might certainly have been forgiven if he had given way to it inwardly, on that occasion, when the nurse walked into the box. She had arrived at a most inopportune moment, just when he was on the verge of obtaining a piece of information most vital to the success of the quest he had in hand—Milly's surname. It was absolutely necessary that he should turn round and explain his presence there.

"I have accidentally found out that this young man is the brother of a lady who has been under my charge in my own home-hospital, and I feel sure

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she would like to know where he is, and would come to him at once if she knew his condition."

"Cannot you write or telegraph to her, sir?" the nurse asked. "It is only a matter of days, perhaps even hours, the doctors think." As she spoke she glanced expressively at the chart of the patient's temperature, which hung above his bed.

"Unfortunately I do not know her present address, but if you will kindly leave me with her brother for a few minutes I feel sure he will be able to tell me. He was quite delirious, but I have managed to soothe him a good deal."

"Very well, sir, I will look after my other patients down the ward. I certainly think some one ought to come to the poor fellow."

Alec thanked her and said he thought so too. Then he turned back to the patient, who had heard nothing of course of what had passed.

"You were speaking about your name, and telling me how you came to take that of Gascoigne. Let me hear the other, and I will tell you which of them I like best," Manton remarked quietly.

The sick man was at this moment convulsed with coughing. The nurse was in the cubicle in an instant, and handed her patient a handkerchief, and, when the paroxysm was over, Manton saw that it was tinged with blood in several places. His heart went out in sympathy with this youth, who had thrown his life away with both hands, who was so strangely like his sister. Alec could not have told what it was which stirred in him most, but the

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fact remained that for the first time for many years the doctor's eyes were suffused with tears. The nurse saw them there, and her own filled also.

"Poor boy," she said, "so young and so good-looking," she added in a whisper, "and to die here all alone."

"I will bring his sister to him," Manton promised. His tone was louder than the nurse's, and his voice much deeper. The sick man heard it.

"Dear old Milly," he said. "She doesn't know I am here—but I know where she is." He coughed again.

"Bring some ice," Manton whispered to the nurse. She turned away quickly to go upon her errand. Alec bent over the bed until his strong kind face was close to the other's weak one. "I will bring Milly," he said, "if you have strength to tell me two things—her other name and where I shall find her."

The sick man looked into Manton's eyes with a searching glance of which Alec had not thought him capable.

"If I tell you where she is you won't let our cousin Alf know it, will you? Alfred Gasterne—he is a Gasterne as we are. Father believed in him, although he did not believe in me. He left it in his will that he wished Alf to marry Milly, and he was to have everything if she died, not me! He hated me, did father, yet Alf was worse than I ever was, I swear to that. He did me all the harm he could, but I wasn't as bad as he—I swear it." The

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youth was wandering again, or very near to it. Manton tried all his methods to soothe him, and to a great extent succeeded. The nurse had returned with the ice, and Alec administered it with his own hands, to the great comfort of the patient.

"I will see Alf Gasterne does not come near Milly," he said in his most soothing tones. "He is a dark man and a trifle lame, is he not?"

"Yes, yes! that is he—you know I believe he loves Milly—he really wanted her for his wife. It was he who got father to put it into the will. But she hates Alf, does Milly; she positively loathes him—the brute."

"Thank God for that," Manton remarked *sotto voce*. "Now tell me one thing more—where is Milly now?"

"She has gone and hidden herself where her maid Alice lives—her father is a miller. It's near Instone, in——" He stopped and fell back in a faint.

"I am afraid you must go now, Dr. Manton," the nurse said. "I am sure he cannot bear any more to-night; but I do hope you will bring his sister, sir—it's a question of hours, not days, I know."

"Never fear," replied the doctor, "I will be sure and bring her. Many thanks for all your kindness to this poor fellow, nurse." He shook hands with her and said good night. Then he looked in at Lysergh's cubicle. The latter had fallen asleep during the period of waiting, and of course Manton

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did not rouse him, much as he would have liked to tell him all. With a sigh of relief and a buoyant hope that the web was beginning to unravel, Alec went down the long flight of steps to the grass quadrangle and so out through the great gateway of Guy's, where the motor he had hired until his own was mended awaited him at the door. The chauffeur who had taken the place of Penrose, temporarily incapacitated owing to the recent accident, was an ex-policeman, who was still in touch with the force as a detective when required, and had been recommended to Manton by Serjeant Skinner. The latter thought it advisable that the doctor should have a driver who could not be got at, and who would also use his position as nominally Manton's servant to watch for some clue, or any suspicious person or circumstance.

It was 10 p.m. when Alec emerged from Guy's. The clocks from the neighbouring churches were striking one after another.

"Drive me to Inspector Jacob's private residence, fourteen Elmington Gardens, South Kensington," Manton directed. The great detective had told him he would be at his private address after the doctor left the hospital. "Get over the ground as quickly as you can."

The order was easier to be carried out by night than it would have been by day. Jacob's house was close to Westminster Bridge. As soon as he conveniently could the chauffeur got on to the Embankment, so as to be able to bowl along almost

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as rapidly as the splendid motor could accomplish. The speed just suited Manton's state of mind. His blood was pulsing rapidly through his veins. He was longing to be doing. First he must find out where Instone was ; then he would go to Milly—Milly Gasterne ! He had heard the name. Oh, yes ! of course, old Sir Geoffrey Gasterne, of Lillingstone Towers, was a Yorkshire magnate of immense wealth, and somewhat eccentric. There had been talk of his will, and of the disinheriting of his son—that poor boy must be Sir Jarvis Gasterne ! lying at Guy's in a paying ward it is true, but under a false name—Gascoigne. Such were the disjointed thoughts which surged through Manton's brain. With a sigh of relief he found they were pulling up before the modest front door of the inspector's private house.

XXIV

A RACE THROUGH THE NIGHT

INSPECTOR JACOB was seated at his desk when Dr. Manton was shown in. He was methodically entering the day's events in a big diary with a heavy brass clasp. The detective put down the memorandum book face open on the table, so that the fresh writing rested on a piece of blotting paper, and stood up to receive his visitor.

"I can see you have news for me, Doctor Manton," he said. "Will you take a chair?"

"I would rather stand," Alec said; "what I have to tell you will only take a minute or two. Then it will be time to act. I have just come from Guy's Hospital, Inspector! In the next cubicle to the one in which my friend Mr. Lysergh is lying, by an extraordinary coincidence, I discovered the brother of the young lady for whom we have been searching." Alec then went on to relate what he and Lysergh had overheard, and all that followed upon it, in the fewest possible words. The detective's interest visibly deepened when Dr. Manton came to mention the names of those concerned.

"Sir Geoffrey Gasterne!" he exclaimed. "No wonder these men risked something to get this estate into their hands. Dinton Towers is one of

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the finest places in Yorkshire, with a rich estate, quite unencumbered, round it ; and I believe Sir Geoffrey left quite a million of net personalty."

"Have you any idea, Inspector, who would be likely to be Alfred Gasterne's allies in this matter ? I can understand his part in it, but as to the others it is more difficult."

"Not at all ! I expect it is a mere question of money. It would pay the cousin to give twenty thousand pounds apiece to his confederates, and there are plenty of men in London, some of them moving in the highest circles too, who would do anything in the world for twenty thousand pounds, from systematically cheating at bridge to carrying off an heiress."

"Do you know where Instone is ? " was Alec's next question. "I have never heard of such a place."

"It is a little village in Essex, not more than thirty miles or so from London."

"I mean to go down there at once," Manton said emphatically.

"To-night ? " the Inspector asked with an expressive lift of his eyebrows.

"Certainly ! there is not a minute to be lost. Why should not these wretches trace Miss Gasterne as we have done ? Alfred probably knows somehow or other that she brought up her maid Alice with her to London. If he can trace the maid he will find the mistress." As Manton said the words he pictured it as already an accomplished fact.

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The perspiration stood on his forehead. He clenched his fist. "Great Scott! Inspector," he exclaimed, "I must be off. Fancy, if a few minutes' delay of mine delivered this girl into his hands. Then there is that poor dying boy at Guy's. He told me where to find his sister and I undertook to bring her to him. It shall not be my fault if I do not keep my word. Good-bye, Inspector." He stepped towards the door. "I will be sure and let you know first thing what has happened."

Jacob stopped Manton with a gesture.

"Wait for me," he said, "and I will come with you. I am in this business, and you may need help. Besides, I have a general idea of the road to Instone, which you have not. You will consume a lot of time in making inquiries, not an easy thing in the middle of the night."

"Of course, Inspector, I shall be most glad to have your company. If I were you I should bring a pistol with you. I have had occasion to learn that these men stick at nothing since they barked my cheek, and since then I have always carried a revolver, ready loaded, in a pocket at the back of my coat." As he spoke Manton fished out the ivory-handled weapon for which Lysergh had procured cartridges on the night that he had met with his own accident, if such it could be called. Inspector Jacob produced an even handier little weapon from a breast-pocket.

"Only four barrels," he remarked pleasantly, "and a very quick bark; but I would undertake

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to account for four men with them at a fairly short range. By the by, how fast can your new motor go, and how many is it seated for ? ”

“ I have not tried it at any great speed, but the manager of the British Motor-car Company guaranteed sixty to seventy miles easily on a good track. It holds four passengers comfortably, five at a pinch.”

“ You will not be able to do more than fifteen miles an hour on those Essex roads to Instone,” Jacob remarked. “ We have a couple of motor cyclists within call, who will do the distance quicker than we shall. I will send them on ahead.” The inspector went into a small room adjoining his office, and there Manton could hear him giving certain instructions over the telephone, in accordance with his last remark. When the inspector returned he said : “ I have a through private wire to Scotland Yard. A couple of well-armed motor cyclists will act as an advance guard for us ; so you need not fear that any time has been lost. They will be at Instone in little more than an hour, and will have found the mill by the time we get there.”

“ Thank you very much, Inspector ; you have certainly got all the materials for a *coup* under your hands. Probably we shall only find a sleeping village and a peaceful mill at the end of our journey.”

“ I should like to catch the man who hit Constable Downie over the head from behind,” Jacob remarked, rubbing his hands over one another, a remark which proved that even detectives are human.

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In a few minutes the inspector had made his preparations, which included a large tin canister full of sandwiches, cut by the cook with a celerity which showed long and frequent practice.

"No army can invade a country with any chance of success unless it is well provisioned, especially for night marches," Jacob remarked, for him almost facetiously. He was a preternaturally grave man.

When they got into the motor the inspector gave the chauffeur certain directions as to route. It was a case of *multum in parvo*. Both men understood each other so well. At one corner the motor slowed up, and a man, after saluting the inspector and Dr. Manton, got up beside the driver. Alec recognized Serjeant Skinner with some surprise. Jacob explained.

"Skinner is at headquarters, and wanted to come with us. I could see no objection, and he may prove useful. There are few handier men in the force, and he has brains as well."

So they bowled along at a great pace, first through the streets, which were more crowded than they had been when Manton left Guy's, or rather it was the difference between West End and City at night; then into the semi-deserted suburbs, and finally into the less smooth roads lined with hedges, which betokened a more open country.

Manton felt the exhilaration of the rapid motion through the night. The cool wind beat upon his forehead and cooled his hot and aching brow. Gradually it seemed to him that he was speeding

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through a dream-world without substance or reality ; the two men in front, the inspector by his side, were but shadows, phantoms of an imagination running riot. The hedgerows were to be seen only through a white mist, heat distilling damp out of the ground. There was not light enough to distinguish houses in detail, only the frames of them, as if the shell only were there, the interiors not having been added as yet. Now and again a church steeple loomed up by the side of the road, like a gaunt finger pointing to the sky. The lights of the motor, as it passed, flickered over the hedgerows, and cut the faint mist with a ribbon of yellow brilliancy. Their course was too rapid, although the roads were too uneven for a very great pace, to allow of more than a transient mental photograph of scene after scene—here a copse and there a tree, and again a farmstead nestling amidst byres, and rounded stacks of corn and hay.

Alec had taken many night journeys in a motor before, but on this occasion he felt differently from anything he had ever experienced on previous occasions. For one thing, never in his life had he passed through anything like the mental strain, and the tension of nerves, which he had endured the last few weeks. Of late loss of sleep had told even upon his extraordinary physique. The night air now made him drowsy, so that he was between sleeping and waking, conscious of external impressions, yet hardly able to distinguish them from figments woven by his fancy. If it had not been for the

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perpetual jolting of the car on the ill-made, and in some cases recently metalled, cross-country roads, Alec might have slept. Yet throughout he was conscious of his errand, of the momentous object in view. He was hoping to see again the woman he had learnt to love with all the ardour and passion of a very strong nature. The speed at which they were going, the late hour of the night, the policemen in front, and the inspector by his side, were so many reminders, if such had been needed, of the strenuous quest which lay before the passengers of that belated motor. These men would not have come if they had not thought something would result from it, quite apart from the service of the affections which Manton was rendering. Inspector Jacob especially was a shrewd and capable officer, as keen on the scent as a sleuthhound, and as reluctant to let go as a bulldog. He was there because he scented the trail, which should bring them into touch with men who had broken the law and braved the police.

How long they rode in silence Manton could not have told ; it might have been hours, days, or even weeks, such was his half-dreamy, half-mystic condition. He seemed to be the play of forces, which were sweeping him along like some great wave, and he the drift-wood on the surface of the tide.

After a while Inspector Jacob was at fault with regard to the route. The motor was pulled up. Jacob got out and consulted a cyclist's map of the district by aid of one of the car lamps. Once they went wrong and came to an impasse, The road

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degenerated into a mere cart-track which ended at the gate of a farm-house courtyard. A sleepy stableman had to be knocked up and questioned. Even after his perturbed feelings had been soothed by the present of a coin, which represented to him more than a day's wage, his answers and explanations in the local patois were quite unintelligible to Manton ; but the police had a wonderful knack both of comprehending a strange jargon, and of retracing their steps when they had lost their way. Manton chafed terribly at the delay and subsequent retrogression. The car, too, got stuck in a rut, and very nearly overturned. If an accident had really happened they would have been stranded miles from anywhere, and the pursuit and quest of the old mill at Instone would have to be abandoned, for that night at any rate. Alec stamped about and fumed. It seemed as if he had not the patience to help lift the carriage out of the deep rut, no doubt made by a traction engine, into which it had settled itself as if for a permanence.

" We shall never get to Instone to-night," Manton remarked almost petulantly to Jacob.

" Oh, yes, we shall ; we are not more than five miles from there now if my map is to be trusted."

" It's your map, confound it," Alec exclaimed, " which has brought us up where we are, and where we seem destined to stay for the rest of our natural lives. I wish we could find some yokel to guide us. I don't believe in maps. I can never find my way by them myself." This was not exactly true, but

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Alec was in a state of irritability which made him violate his usual convictions.

"I don't think it would quite answer—at any rate, from our point of view, that of the police you understand—to take up just any one with us. He might quite unintentionally give a warning by calling out, or in some other way which would allow our friends the enemy to slip through our hands."

"Besides, sir," Serjeant Skinner put in, "these local guides take you wrong far more often than they take you right. I have found it so scores of times. If they have been to a place once, or even only heard tell of it, as they say, they tell you how to get there with the greatest assurance. I would far rather trust myself to a good map, begging your pardon for differing, Dr. Manton."

"Well, I suppose I must defer to your superior knowledge," Alec conceded, but it was in a tone which suggested that he "that complied against his will is of the same opinion still."

By this time they had got the car round, and were all climbing into the vehicle again with a view to starting afresh. Inspector Jacob did not sit down directly, but stood up in the motor, shading his eyes with his hand so as to concentrate his gaze.

"What are you looking at?" Manton inquired impatiently. The driver of the motor was waiting quietly with his hand on the wheel, until he should receive the signal to start. Although the doctor was the nominal master of the car, Inspector Jacob had virtually assumed command of the expedition

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from the start. This was natural, as the two other men, in addition to Alec, were both members of the force. During the delay the motor was throbbing, as it were, its very heart out under them, and almost seemed, to Manton's heated imagination, like a greyhound ready to spring forward after its prey as soon as it was slipped from the leash.

XXV

A TERRIBLE NEMESIS

INSPECTOR JACOB did not answer for a full minute.

"I fancied I saw lights moving rapidly, but I have not seen them again. So either I was mistaken, or there is a depression in the road which hides them from view."

"All the more reason for pushing on as quickly as we can," Manton suggested. "We don't want to arrive just too late." He pictured Milly Gasterne without a defender, taking refuge in a lonely mill-house, with only dependents about her, suddenly roused at the dead of night, and carried off by a man without scruple, to whom the possession of her would mean coercion into a hateful marriage and the possession of incalculable wealth. Even the swift motor throbbing beneath Manton, speeding through the darkness, was not quick enough to satisfy his ardent longings to reach the scene of their pilgrimage. Twice he impatiently urged the driver to get all the power possible out of the engine, and had to be satisfied with the reply, which was obviously true, that the pace they were going was only just within the bounds of safety, on such a road as the one they were following. The lateness of the hour and the loneliness of the district

A Terrible Nemesis

were their safeguards against meeting any other vehicle. Otherwise there must have been delay, and more than likely an accident. Inspector Jacob quite understood what Manton was feeling, and, in spite of his stoicism, shared something of the doctor's anxiety to reach their destination. To Inspector Jacob it might mean a crowning achievement in a long series of professional successes. To Manton it meant the salvation of the one being he loved more than any one in the world.

"We are fortunate in our driver," the detective remarked, as they slackened pace slightly near the foot of a short hill, across which a little brook meandered at will, a terrible place of risk for springs; "there is no one to equal him in the force, and not many out of it. Very few chauffeurs would have undertaken to drive, at the pace we have come, over roads he has never traversed in his life before."

"Yes, I think that," Alec replied. "It was only my impatience; I know that perfectly. Please forgive me."

After that silence supervened once more, and Manton relapsed into that half-visionary mood with which he had begun the journey. There was nothing to indicate where they were; they might be travelling on an interminable journey through space, lost, absolutely without control over their own movements, almost without volition. Only that there in front was the calm, almost immovable figure of the driver, alert, responsible.

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Manton was roused from his visionary mood by the slackening of the motor-car.

"We are nearing Instone," the inspector remarked. The doctor could see nothing to indicate they were approaching anything or anywhere. The country for the last ten miles had been very sparsely inhabited. Beyond a haystack, now and then, there had been nothing to break the monotony of the perpetual hedges. Suddenly a light flashed out at them. It was that of a motor cyclist, one of the two Inspector Jacob had sent as an advance guard. The car stopped and the constable jumped off his machine. The detective went towards the constable.

"Well," he asked, "is all quiet?"

"You are just in time, sir; there is another motor in front with some men in it. They have just swung away to the left, towards the mill, which is about three parts of a mile from here. Godson is watching there. I came forward to meet you, sir, and the other carriage passed me at a good swing."

"Did they see you, Markham?" Jacob inquired, but not as if he expected an affirmative answer.

"Oh no, sir, I had dowsed lights and was in the hedge. I thought it might be you, sir; but the other motor was painted a very dark colour—blue, I should think, while I knew Doctor Manton's was yellow."

"How many men were inside?" Alec inquired eagerly.

A Terrible Nemesis

" I couldn't say for certain, sir, they went pretty quickly and the night is so dark. The only light they carried was right at the back of the car. I am certain there were three of them; there may have been four, but I don't think so."

" Thank you, Markham ; keep just behind us. Now then, hurry, driver, to the left at the next turn. Look well ahead and see that you don't quite come within hearing of the carriage in front." The inspector turned to Manton in the car. " I should like to take them red-handed," he said.

Alec only clenched his fists ; the lust of battle was upon him. How thankful he was that the strange revelation had been made to him at Guy's where to find Milly. Surely Providence had once more ordered that he should save her ?

XXVI

THE MILL

AGAINST the sky-line they could just discern the outline of the old mill. At Markham's suggestion they had left the main road, and taken a short cut, on foot, across the fields, by a pathway worn by the tread of the miller and his men. Their motor had been left, in charge of the driver, on a waste piece of land by the roadside. The party consisted of Dr. Manton, Inspector Jacob, Serjeant Skinner, and Constable Markham. The four figures moved along silently, not that they were afraid of being heard, but when men are tense with expectancy, in the thick of action, speech takes second place and is only resorted to when necessary. As they drew near the mill they could hear the murmur of the stream, which supplied the power for the great wheel, now motionless.

About thirty yards from the building was a fence, over which they would have to climb by a rude wooden ladder, with a fork at the top, to reach the other side. When they reached it a voice said—

“Is that you, sir?”

“Yes, Godson. What is going on?” It was Inspector Jacob that put the question. He was walking with Markham in front, Manton and Serjeant Skinner being just behind.

The Mill

"There are three men up at the mill, sir. One has a bit of a jerk when he walks."

Manton touched Skinner's arm.

"That is our man," he said. "If it comes to collaring let me be the one to tackle him."

"All right, sir, as long as we see fair play."

"What are the men doing?"

"I fancy they want to get in, sir."

"Not at all improbable," Jacob remarked half sarcastically, although he was pretty used to his officer's caution in giving evidence.

"It's a hard nut to crack. There is only one door—a heavy oak one, clamped with iron. I tried it myself before any one came. It would not budge an inch. The lower part of the mill is used for grinding the corn and for storage, I expect, only the upper part being lived in. At least, that is the case with most of these water-mills about the country."

"Is there any way of getting at the upper story?"

"Not that I could see, sir, unless they have climbed up by the big wheel. It runs in a grooved space and it would be possible to get at one of the windows from the case of the wheel; but it would take a bold man, sir, to try it, and it would be kingdom come in half a second, if the wheel got in motion while any one was on it at all near the top."

"Great Scott, man!" Alec interrupted. "What are we standing here talking for?"—they had climbed the stile and alighted on the farther side—"let us get there and prevent whatever these men are attempting to do. They may frighten these

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women to death if they do nothing more. Of course, if there is a way into the living rooms by the big wheel, up that way they will go. They stick at nothing, we know that well enough."

"That is right. Markham, lead on and show us the way," Inspector Jacob directed.

The constable did as he was told. Manton, who could not be restrained, ran by his side, and every now and again got in front, once paying for it by pitching headlong over a trough and sending it flying into the stream which ran close to the path. Alec as nearly as possible followed the trough into the water. Markham seized him by the arm.

"Take care, sir, the bank is very steep, and there is a big rush of water——"

He was about to add something more, when they were all startled by the deep baying of a great dog, apparently fastened up somewhere within the mill. Either it was roused by the sound of footsteps outside, or by the splash of the trough into the stream. Once more they all ran forward. The barking of the dog would assuredly rouse the people asleep in the mill, and some fresh development was sure to follow. They had got close to the wall of the building, and, rapidly circling it came within view of the big wheel. It was just light enough to see it in outline. Manton cried, "Look!" and at the same time drew his revolver. There were three men on the wheel, one almost at the top, the other two on stages below.

"Don't fire," Jacob said authoritatively. "Wait!

The Mill

they cannot get away. Besides, the people in the mill are roused, and they will certainly secure that window." Before the inspector spoke he had seen lights proceeding from more than one of the upper rooms. Suddenly a casement was opened and a deep voice said—

"Who is there? Are you trying to break into my house? It will be the worse for you."

The voice was answered by a flash of light and the sharp crack of a shot. One of the men on the wheel had fired at the speaker. Manton again raised his revolver, but the inspector struck up his hand. One of the barrels went off, but quite harmlessly, in the direction of the stars. A voice from above shouted—

"Come on—be quick."

Another answered—"No, it's not safe! Let's go back."

Then suddenly a cry arose alike from the men on the wheel and from the watchers below, which could be heard for miles in the silence of the night.

The great wheel had begun to revolve. At first slowly, then more rapidly it circled. The miller had started the machinery. It was his answer to the revolver shot, which had been within an ace of taking his life.

Inspector Jacob and the other policemen looked on grimly; but Manton covered his eyes.

First one man sprang, then another; but the leap was too great for any man's accomplishment, without a take-off, to achieve safely. They fell,

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one after another, into the spuming water below, churned up by the great wheel as it revolved slowly and relentlessly, like Fate itself ; and there met their fate instantly with only that one cry as a requiem.

Not one of those who assisted as spectators of that terrible scene ever forgot the tragedy of that August night.

XXVII

DOUBTS AND—CERTAINTY

IT fell to Dr. Manton to explain to Miss Gasterne an outline of the incidents which had just occurred. He did so in as few words and as delicately as possible. She hardly realized all that it meant. Fortunately for her the other topic of conversation, with regard to her brother's dangerous condition, absorbed so much of her interest, that it prevented her mind dwelling on the details of the tragedy which had occurred at the lonely mill.

Miss Gasterne's one great wish was to be taken to her brother without delay; this also coincided entirely with Manton's own feeling. He, too, was most anxious to get away from a place fraught with such terrible memories. It was therefore arranged that Miss Gasterne and her maid should drive back to London almost immediately in the motor which had brought Manton and the police.

Inspector Jacob and his assistants were to remain to deal with matters on the spot. An inquest had, of course, to be held, which Manton would have to attend later on, but all preliminary arrangements the inspector, in conjunction with the heads of the local constabulary, was able to take off his hands.

Manton snatched a hasty meal, while he induced Milly to swallow a glass of wine and a piece of bread.

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Directly after this they commenced the return journey, the constable-chauffeur driving. The doctor and Milly sat side by side, and for the greater part of the journey her hand rested in his. No words had passed between them, it was neither the appropriate time or place, but the understanding was there all the same, and both felt it to the full.

Only one communication of any importance passed between them during the latter part of the journey. When they were nearing London, the houses growing closer and closer together, Manton asked her, and as he did so he took her hand once more into his—

“Why did you run away from me—Milly?”

She half nestled to him.

“Because I was afraid for you, especially after what had happened about the shot in my room. I knew they would stick at nothing, and you were the great obstacle in the way. Alfred, my cousin, poor fellow! wanted the money very badly—he had always expected a very large share. I think, too”—she said this in tones which Manton could hardly catch—“he also wanted me a little; he did really care for me in his own way. Oh! I hate to say it, perhaps I ought not to say it now, but he was a terrible man, the only man I have ever known, I have ever been abjectly afraid of.”

Manton pressed her hand.

“You will never run away from me again?” he whispered.

“No, never—I promise.”

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Alec did not loose the hand of which he had possession until they were close to their destination.

How much that touch meant to both of them; a vow and a dedication to each.

Very soft and refreshing was the morning air as they entered the streets of the metropolis. It seemed hardly possible to believe that the night had hidden such a terrible tragedy and seen the climax of so much crime and mystery.

In spite of all her anxiety about her brother, Miss Gasterne could not help feeling an intense sense of relief, when she realized that she was free from all the persecutions to which she had been subjected for so long. Dr. Manton's absorbing thought was that he had recovered the jewel which had been snatched from him. How thankful he was that they had arrived in time, and how fully he realized the overruling hand of Providence, which had twice sent him to intervene, to the salvation of the girl by his side.

They reached Guy's at eight o'clock in the morning, having been delayed en route at a little village inn, where the motor required some slight readjustment of its machinery. There coffee had been partaken of, and Manton had enjoyed the delicious sensation of looking after his lovely charge with a sense of possession.

Miss Gasterne was shown at once into her brother's presence, and from this time forward was in constant attendance, until he passed away about a week later. During those days a great change came over the

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young man. He listened eagerly to the ministrations of the chaplain, and received many thoughts of repentance, comfort, and peace.

Lysergh had recovered sufficiently to be removed to his father's house. Manton was obliged to return to Instone for the inquest. Fortunately Milly's presence was not required, only absolutely necessary evidence was given, and the name of the family did not transpire in the press. On Manton's return to London he found Sir Jarvis Gasterne had passed quietly away during his absence. A note was awaiting him from Milly, asking him to be present at the funeral, three days later, in Lillingstone churchyard.

Mrs. Aitchison and Milly had gone back to the Towers. Dr. Manton was invited to stay there during his visit to the north, but he preferred to make his headquarters at the village inn. He had been very busy before his actual departure, so that he had had no opportunity of saying good-bye to Lysergh, but had only been able to send over a brief note, explaining where he was going. Algy had, of course, taken the greatest interest in the *dénouement* of the story with which he had had, against his will at the beginning, so much to do.

When Inspector Jacob returned to London, Lysergh asked him to give him his first spare moments, as he wished to have a full account of all that the police had discovered. Having once got the clue, Algy was certain that they would rapidly unravel all the threads of the plot. In this he was not mistaken. The result of his interview with

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Jacob appears in the following letter, which was duly delivered to Manton at the "Oat Sheaf," in Lillingstone village.

"My dearest Alec,—I feel sure that you will like to have a line from me, as we were unable to meet before you left. I can quite understand how very much you would have to do, and, to tell you the truth, I did not expect you to come to me. I think Maurice Farner deserves a great deal of credit for the consideration he has shown for his senior partner. I am feeling wonderfully better ; it is extraordinary how rapidly one mends after a good beginning has been made. I am writing this letter after ten o'clock at night, which I think shows conclusively that I have gained my liberty from the tyranny of doctors and nurses ; not that I have a word to say against them, even in fun, for they have been awfully good to me, and under God I owe them my life. I never realized how ill I had been until I began to get better. I am really writing to tell you some things which I think it is necessary for you to know. I sent a note to Inspector Jacob to ask him to give me a call at his earliest convenience, whenever his professional duties allowed him to do so. He came to me this evening ; I was much struck with his professional powers ; he certainly is an admirable type of a much maligned body of men. He told me that the police have discovered two things of great interest, with regard to the plot which ended in such disastrous fashion to those who planned it.

"In the first place, Mr. Alfred Gasterne was in

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possession of a special license for his marriage with his cousin, which, as you probably know, overrides all ordinary laws. A marriage under it would be valid at any place and at any hour, so that the room which was turned into a chapel that night at 24 Cursitor Avenue was not, in all probability, intended, as we all surmised, for a mock ceremony to intimidate Miss Mildred into a real one later on. The whole affair was genuine enough so far. The marriage would have taken place in Miss Gasterne's stupefied condition in a very short space of time, if you had not intervened. You may lay this circumstance, Alec, on the credit side of things you have to be thankful for.

"The second discovery fits into the first. The police now know the real names of the two men who were Alfred Gasterne's assistants throughout this affair. The tall man who was knocked down, or pretended he had been knocked down, and was subsequently brought into your home-hospital, had passed, Jacob told me, under several aliases, but his real name has been ascertained to be Stephen Gadesby. Originally a gentleman by birth, he went from bad to worse, descending rung after rung of the social ladder. He got involved in some very shady transactions on the turf, and was finally warned off by the stewards of the Jockey Club. Since then he has lived chiefly by fleecing young men at bridge or billiards in shady clubs in Town, or at favourite resorts on the continent.

"The third man, and here the key fits the lock,

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was a cleric over whom Alfred Gasterne had acquired some extraordinary influence, probably owing to his knowledge of some secret which placed the man in his power. Alfred Gasterne was quite capable of working this lever for all he was worth. The name of the cleric was Thomas Denner. I have ascertained that he still appears in the clergy list, for although for a long time he had been unable to attain any decent work in his own profession, nothing had ever been proved against him sufficiently to deprive him of his rights. I think now that we hold all the threads of this vile conspiracy. To you Miss Gasterne owes her escape from a doom, I should consider, and I believe she would too, worse than death. I trust that the darkness lies behind, and that a bright day is dawning for both of you. As you know, dearest old friend, I feel very differently about the matter now than I did only a short time ago. I love to think that you are about to enjoy a happiness for which you are specially qualified, and without which your life would never have been complete. Our friendship will continue, of this I am assured, and I hope that Miss Mildred will take a lonely man into her regard likewise. Now I am tired ; my head tells me I have done more than perhaps I ought to have attempted. Good night. From ever affectionately your old friend—Algy.”

The funeral of Sir Jarvis Gasterne was fixed for two o'clock on the day following Dr. Manton's

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arrival at Lillingstone. It was a lovely afternoon, very warm, flooded with sunlight, but with a certain freshness indicative of the approach of autumn. The parish church, with its tall spire, was situated a little apart from the village on slightly rising ground ; behind it was an amphitheatre of hills, covered with heather, which glowed a deep purple in the sunlight.

Manton had not seen Mildred since his arrival. He was one of the first to reach the lych gate of the burying ground. A few of the villagers were scattered about, sitting on the low wall which divided God's acre from the field surrounding it, or reading the inscriptions on the stones, probably for the fiftieth time. Manton could not help reflecting what a sad story it was, that of this short life, now so prematurely ended in a great London hospital. The peaceful scene before him, the glory of the surrounding hills, the sombre dresses of the village folk, the quiet peace of the church and its environment, all seemed so far remote from that small cubicle in a long ward at Guy's, with the hum of the London traffic coming in continually through the open window.

One by one the carriages drove up to the gate, depositing their occupants—country gentlemen, with a sprinkling of their wives, attending to do honour to the obsequies of one of their number. These later arrivals stood waiting near the porch at the west end of the church. Manton went and stood with them. The great tenor bell from the

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belfry was booming out its solemn note at short intervals.

Punctually at two o'clock the procession reached the outer gate ; the coffin was carried on the shoulders of some of the tenantry. Manton's eyes rested on the figures immediately behind it. Mildred Gasterne was leaning on the arm of a tall, military-looking man, in all probability some connection of the family ; her black veil had been drawn down over her face ; but just for a moment she lifted it as she entered the church, while the first words of the burial office—so full of hope, and comfort, and final triumph—floated through the air.

Manton was one of those standing with doffed hats on either side ; for a second he fancied Mildred's beautiful eyes rested on his own, a tiny tinge of colour invaded her white cheek, then she dropped her veil again, and passed into the church.

In the afternoon Manton went out for a walk over the hills ; he was not returning to Town until the following day, and had not made up his mind what his course of action would be. It hardly seemed an appropriate time to pay a visit to Mildred at the Towers ; on the other hand, he longed intensely to see her again, to take her soft hand into his, to express by look, and imperfectly by words, the great sympathy he had for her. Under the condition of unrest, which pervaded his whole system, Manton could not remain in the somewhat stuffy atmosphere of the upstairs room, which had been placed at his disposal by the landlord of the " Oat Sheaf." The

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very routine of the village inn jarred upon him. Death only interrupts for a very brief period the ordinary round of life. Carters came to have their pint of ale before they passed on towards Sheffield ; he could hear the cracking of their whips as they started again, and the sound of their cheery voices. Even the hum of the men sitting in the tap-room reached him through the floor. He took his hat and went out, selecting the road which led away from the direction of the Towers, past the churchyard, towards the highest point of the hills, which ranged themselves against the clear blue of the horizon. For two hours and more Manton walked, generally at a brisk pace, but sometimes with more lingering steps. When he got three-parts of the way up Scaw Head, the eminence just spoken of, he looked back. It was his first glimpse of the Towers. He stood for some minutes gazing down upon it. In his mind were many mingled feelings. Looking at the blue smoke rising up from the chimneys at the back, doubtless belonging to the kitchens, he realized Mildred Gasterne's propinquity. Under that roof she lived ; she was there now. Of what was she thinking ? of whom ? Of the man just laid to rest, the brother she had so fondly loved, and whom no doubt she so deeply mourned ? Of himself ? Yes, he did not doubt that some of her thoughts went out to him. That transient glance which she had given him, absolutely without intending to do so, at the west gateway of the church, assured him of his place in her mind, in her heart.

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Then other thoughts swept over him. He could see the wide expanse of the park with its long stretches of turf, its fine trees, which obscured and yet suggested the dignity of the house itself. At the farther end a herd of deer was browsing quietly. All spoke of the importance and wealth of the owner of the mansion, and of the property adjoining it. That owner was the girl who had lain insensible at the home-hospital, the girl he loved with all the passionate intensity of his soul. Alec Manton's heart sank a little ; he could not help feeling that Mildred Gasterne's position and wealth formed a barrier between them. He was not a poor man—anything but that, in fact—apart from his profession. If he chose to retire, he could still offer to the woman he might marry an excellent position ; and at the same time all this was very different from the vast fortune Mildred herself possessed, and the Towers emphasized.

Manton completed his walk with a certain sense of irritation and of hesitation, quite alien to his usual condition of mind. He could not give Mildred Gasterne up—that was unthinkable ; at the same time he felt the onus of her surroundings pressing upon his spirit. When he reached the "Oat Sheaf," on his return, it was nearly seven o'clock, the hour he had fixed for dinner earlier in the day.

The landlord met him in the doorway. "From Miss Gasterne, sir," he said. "A footman brought it from the Towers. As you were out he did not wait for an answer." Manton took the note to his

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room before opening it. His fingers were trembling ; never before had he felt so nervous, in removing the cover of any communication he had received, in his life. Walking to the window, he read the few lines by the aid of the evening light. They ran as follows :—

“ My dear friend,—I am so glad you were with us this afternoon. I felt your presence ; it gave me, not for the first time, a sense of sympathy and strength. I write this line to ask you to come to me at the Towers about nine o’clock to-night. I shall be on the terrace. Ever yours gratefully, Milly.”

It was a lovely September night, than which there is nothing more perfect in the whole year. The harvest moon was just rising above the horizon. The heat of the day had given place to a fresh crispness—almost a frost, but not quite. Dewdrops sparkled on hedgerow and roadside grass. Alec left the inn in a strangely mingled mood, diffident in the thought of the great happiness which might be his, yet with thrills of doubt, such as every true man feels, who has before him the prospect of knitting to his heart and life the woman, who has come to mean to him the brimming cup of life. Was he worthy to ask her to give him all that a woman has to give—her love, herself ? They knew so little of one another, measured by all ordinary calculations. Doubt he had none ; but how about Milly ? His was love at first sight, deepening, it is true, as time went on, but always there from that first moment when Manton

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had bent over her in Cursitor Avenue. But with Milly it might well be different. He could not tell. At first Alec had walked quickly, but as he approached the park wall his steps slackened. He almost wished to postpone this interview, on which all the world depended.

The great gates were wide open. Only a few minutes before Mr. Frank Martin, of Martin and Goodbody, the family solicitors, had driven through, on his way to the station, to catch the night express to London.

As Manton paced the broad, well-kept drive, nearly a mile long, and then came in view of the terraces which flanked the road on both sides, with the Towers in a commanding position above, he realized again what a great heiress Miss Gasterne was. He felt that her position came in between them, and his heart grew chill. He was in half a mind to turn round and go back to the inn.

Alec walked more slowly, until he was conscious of a black figure, with a white cloak thrown lightly about her shoulders, standing on the highest tier of the terrace before the house. It was Milly. She was waiting for him. He cast doubt to the winds, and sprang up to the same level, on which she stood to greet him.

Dr. Manton folded the slight figure in his arms, and without pause or hesitation their lips met.

"I did not mean to talk to you of love," he whispered, "darling, and this is not the right time to say all I have to say."

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"There is no occasion to say anything," she answered. "There is nothing to say, for we know all." Milly buried her head on his broad shoulder, and cried as if her very heart would break. Alec did not seek to check that flow, for he knew it was best for her to let go the pent-up emotion, with its varied strands, which choked her voice, and stayed the action of her heart.

"I have been so lonely," she said, "so terribly lonely; you can never guess or understand how lonely."

Alec took her beautiful head into his hands and kissed her hair. As he did so he remembered vividly that first scene in Cursitor Avenue, when he had had to cut off some of those luxuriant tresses. Thank God, she was safe now! Thank God, she was *his*!

"Darling," he whispered, "you shall never be lonely again; you have, I know, given your heart and life into my keeping, and I will watch over both as the most priceless possession ever entrusted to man."

So for an hour they walked about on the terrace, not talking much, but just happy and restful in the possession of each other; while the moon shone in the clear September sky, and the Towers was the silent witness of the happiness of its mistress.

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